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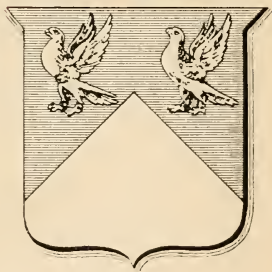


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# A MATTER OF SKILL.

A Novel

BY

BEATRICE WHITBY,

AUTHOR OF "THE AWAKENING OF MARY FENWICK."



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HENRY MORSE STEPHENS

# A MATTER OF SKILL.

## CHAPTER I.

"If ladies be but young and fair,  
They have the gift to know it."

*As You Like It.*

UPON the uncarpeted floor of a shabbily-furnished bedroom stood a small open trunk, before which knelt a girl who was engaged in packing her few possessions within its narrow dimensions. This task she performed with ostentatious indifference, as though she realized their worthlessness and what sheer waste of time it would be were she to wrap cotton gowns and shady hats in tissue-paper, or to expend thought or ingenuity on the arrangement of so scanty a wardrobe.

Though the room in which she knelt was uncarpeted and not ornamental, it was large, airy, and cheerful. The broad window, through which the summer sunshine streamed, was wide open, and round its casement a Gloire de Dijon rose, in full bloom, trailed its notched leaves and sweet blos-

## A MATTER OF SKILL.

soms. Outside in the garden a linnet was singing, and the air smelled of mignonette and heliotrope.

All the time the girl was packing she sang to herself in a light-hearted, nonchalant way, which spoke well for the unshadowed gayety of her mind.

These were the words she sang :

“ A man who would woo a fair maid,  
Should 'prentice himself to the trade,  
And study all day, in methodical way,  
How to flatter, cajole, and persuade.  
It is purely a matter of skill,  
Which all may attain if they will,  
But every Jack he should study the knack  
If he wants to make sure of his Jill !”

Very soon the trunk was filled and her work done. Then she rose slowly to her feet, and going over to the window she leaned out, still singing—

“ Then a glance may be timid or free,  
It may vary in mighty degree,  
From an impudent stare  
To a look of despair,  
Which no maid without pity can see,  
And a glance of despair is no guide,  
It may have its ridiculous side,  
It may draw you a tear,  
Or a box on the ear,  
You can never be sure till you've tried.”

She was a tall girl, and she made the most of her

height, for she held her head high and moved with much stately dignity when she was in the humor to be grand. There was a distinguished air about her which was more remarkable than her beauty, though that, too, was by no means inconsiderable.

Her eyes were lovely ; gray eyes, which could be deep, or tender, or cold, or mischievous, according to their owner's mood—not her will, for there was nothing artificial about the young lady. Her lips curved with laughter, though they knew the trick of falling into severe lines if their mistress was displeased. The voice with which she sang was clear, refined, and just a little cold. Her complexion was delicate and pale ; her brown hair was curled and coiled and trimly bound to her small head. She was carefully though poorly dressed ; her clothes, however shabby, never suggested that they had been “shoveled on with a pitchfork,” were worn to the best advantage. Her old serge gown was brushed into a semblance of smartness ; the collar round her long throat and the cuffs above her well-bred hands were spotless. A red rose was tucked into the bosom of her gown.

Her bearing betokened a self-reliance and self-possession which are usually the outcome of conscious superiority, and though she was neither ag-

gressively conceited nor inordinately proud, yet she had no mean opinion of her attractions. She had, perhaps, rather an exaggerated idea of the value of the blue blood in her veins, inherited from the old Welsh family of which her mother was a member.

She was proud of her ancestors, proud of herself altogether, and, what was more, she was a trifle proud of her pride.

Her father was rector of Meriton, a village in the Midlands. The living was a poor one, and the rector's private income was very small; the girl Helen, his only child, had been reared in poverty from her cradle. The beautiful things of life which she loved had been denied her; but with admiring parents, pleasant friends, plenty of genial society, a home which she considered perfection, and in which she reigned as absolute monarch, she had found nothing to desire. Her temper was imperious and quick, but where everything was arranged with a view to her pleasure she found little to try it, and had danced through her twenty-one years of life, rejoicing on her way, as happy as a kitten and as light of heart as a child.

Her first trial had come, "not with womanhood," but with her father's first bachelor curate, who had fallen promptly and desperately in love with her. /

Her gray eyes were beautiful but cold; laughter, not love, was to be found in them; she really had no patience with the young man's folly. He was a quiet, unassuming person, and Mrs. Mitford had vainly tried to persuade her impervious daughter to recognize and appreciate his commendable qualities.

For some time Helen had refused to treat this serious matter seriously. She had continued to walk with the gentleman, to sing to him, to play golf and tennis with him, to make up his mind for him on all subjects, recklessly disregarding consequences.

"Oh, it is only fancy, mother," she had said, when Mrs. Mitford remonstrated. "If I don't take any notice of it, it will blow over."

"Will it?" her mother groaned, shaking her head. "I hope it may, but these things sometimes blow into flame instead of blowing over."

Mrs. Mitford was right. Driven to desperation by the girl's behavior, her lover had refused to be silenced, and for once so far asserted himself as to demand an interview with her father, and an explanation with herself. For many days, by a thousand ruses, she had managed to postpone it, but it came at last.



The interview had been solemn, and the explanation so passionate and prolonged that Helen had been frightened and agitated into angry resentment. She had been most disagreeable and repellant, and he, stung by her coldness, had reproached her with vehemence. It had been very dreadful, and she had felt extremely ashamed of herself.

For one long day after this scene Helen had been subdued, and went about the house and garden at a slow walk, neither singing nor smiling. She had discovered that some feelings, faculties, emotions were abroad in the world of which she knew nothing, and the approach of which she should be most particularly careful to shun.

Upon the following morning, by what Helen welcomed as a lucky turn of Fortune's wheel, she had received an invitation to pay Mr. Mitford's maiden sister a visit, at a village on the North Devonshire coast. Such an invitation had been proffered yearly, hitherto Helen had expressed no wish to accept it, but now she had changed her mind.

As soon as she had finished reading her aunt's letter, she tossed it across the breakfast-table to her mother, saying—

“Here is Aunt Elizabeth's annual invitation, mother; will you read it? She is such a dear old

thing, and she really wants me. The new people—those dreadful Jones'—are going to give a ball this month; she says Mrs. Majoribanks would take me. I think, no, I am sure, I should like to go."

Mrs. Mitford, who had never arranged a plan in her life, but who had, with peaceful success, allowed herself to be guided by any who cared to exert themselves to think for her, obediently perused the letter.

Helen and her mother possessed dispositions directly antithetical each to the other, but in common they owned one trait—each adored the other with that open, perfect, self-sacrificing, blind love which seems out of fashion nowadays between mother and daughter, but which creates an otherwise unattainable happiness in home life.

Mrs. Mitford possessed the still comely remains of beauty, but with her, as with Helen, an indescribable air of good breeding was the predominating characteristic of her appearance. In common, too, they owned finely-molded features, small heads held high, tall and graceful figures. But the elder lady's face was mildly dignified; her lips were never compressed by sudden anger nor curved with pride, neither did they break into wide laughter nor ripple with wicked smiles, as did her daughter's.

The mother was an optimist; she took life easily and good-humoredly, so she was good and cheerful company both to herself and her neighbors.

When she had finished reading her sister-in-law's letter, she laid it down by the side of her coffee-cup and looked up, rather wistfully, at Helen.

"Did you say that you would like to go to Devonshire, dear?"

"Yes, mother. You see, Aunt Elizabeth says she will pay my journey, so there is really no reason why I should not go."

"Certainly not, dear. You shall do as you wish. Henry"—addressing the Rector—"Henry, Helen is going down to Noelcombe to stay with Elizabeth."

The Rector was reading the *Morning Post*. He lowered it, and looked rather absently at his wife.

"I am very glad to hear it," he said. "The sea is delightful at this time of year, and Elizabeth's carnations will be in full bloom. I shall be curious to hear whether the primrose variety has deteriorated; don't forget to let me know, Helen."

Mr. Mitford was a good clergyman, and he was also a zealous gardener. He was of an indolent, easy-going temperament. The milk of human kindness abounded in his kind heart; he was much loved by his parishioners, and if he did little good, at least

he did no harm. He lived a contented, happy, unambitious life, and of the many perfections of a charming world he considered Mrs. and Miss Mitford the masterpieces.

The Rector returned to his paper, and Helen ate her breakfast deliberately and in silence.

"I shall start the day after to-morrow, mother," she presently announced, having assured herself that such was her feasible desire, "for I really must get away from Mr. Flight. Now don't look severe. It is for his own sake I am going—partly, you know. I am sure he will be glad when I am gone, though he mayn't think so just at first. In this place I meet him at every corner; and on Sunday, when he preaches about the sorrows of life, he looks at me, and it is so horrid."

"My dear, my dear, you must not be heartless. Poor Mr. Flight!"

"That's just what he is, mother—he is *poor*. I don't mean penniless, you know, because he is pretty well off. I mean poor-spirited; he has no pride. Pshaw. Think of wishing to marry a person who doesn't like you! Think of not only wishing it, but talking about the wish!" There was a fine scorn in her voice. "It is contemptible, insufferable, despicable!"

Mrs. Mitford never excited herself to argue—seldom to give an opinion—but now she spoke with decision.

“Mr. Flight is a nice young man, Helen—quite nice. You should have believed me; I warned you. I have such experience and foresight as you will some day acquire, no doubt, though you are long about it. In this quiet place, where there is little to distract a gentleman, I do not see how he could well have avoided falling in love with you.” The disdain of Helen’s face perplexed her mother. “It is no offense on his part; it is the greatest compliment he could pay you, dear. You have no right to despise him for it.”

“But mother, he is so ridiculous or so tiresome. I laugh or I get angry—I can’t help it.”

Mrs. Mitford sighed.

“My dear,” she said “you will be an old maid, and when it is too late you will be sorry.”

No girl likes that dismal epithet, “an old maid,” applied to her, even in joke. Mrs. Mitford was in earnest, and Helen grew grave.

“I shall marry,” she said, “some day—not too soon. I love pretty clothes and pretty things about me, and therefore I love the money that buys them, and therefore I shan’t marry a poor man. When

I fall in love"—with distinct disrelish of the prospect—"I shall take care to fix on a rich man—a Croesus—so as to combine prudence with passion, mother, and make a good match."

Mrs. Mitford nodded.

"Well, my dear, if you do it will be very wise of you. When I was young, girls were not so prudent as they are at present. When your father suggested our marriage, I agreed without casting a thought to his income. I was never a practical woman, I—"

"No," broke in the Rector, startling his wife and daughter, in whose conversation he never joined until his paper had been read from end to end; "thank my stars, you were not a practical woman, Honora. You were a tender-hearted, sweet girl, such as I should like to see that silly girl there, who thinks her airs and graces very smart at present, but who will find them poor and cold company before long, let me tell you. Don't pride yourself on your obduracy, Nell. A yielding disposition is a charming and womanly attribute."

"Father, that's a dull paper," said his daughter, smiling rather deprecatingly, "or you would not put it down to scold me; if I am made of brick instead of gutta-percha, it isn't my fault. It is all Mr.



Flight's fault for finding it out. I owe him ten thousand grudges. I shall have to say 'yes,' that is the only effectual way I know of paying him out."

"Do not worry yourself about her, Henry," said his wife with a calm and superior smile, "when the right man comes she will be, like the rest of her sisterhood, only too ready to leave her home and her people."

"Then I hope the right man will be rich," said the girl, making a grimace, "excessively and abnormally rich, for I shall want a very big bribe to console me for leaving home."

That conversation had taken place on Monday morning ; on Wednesday Miss Mitford had packed her small trunk in the manner already described. Upon that afternoon she was to travel to Noelcombe, where she had undertaken to spend a long month away from her home and in company with Miss Elizabeth Mitford.

It was not until she had collected her possessions and looked at them critically, that she realized how scanty and worthless they were. Poverty was a disadvantage. Helen owned a slender foot—an arched instep, and perfect ankle—the form of which was disguised in a country-built boot. Helen owned



a skin fair and delicate as the petals of a La France rosebud, but she might not wear a white gown because the cost of washing was a consideration. Helen had received an invitation to a ball, but was it a thing to be desired when her one ball dress was draggled, limp, soiled, and would be shamed by a dive into smart company, where it must brave comparison with creations from the brain of a M. Worth or a Kate Reilly? Poverty at home sits lightly on our shoulder, we hardly feel his weight, but when we introduce him to new scenes and rich neighbors, change of air increases his bulk and he becomes a burdensome and oppressive comrade.

Helen looked down upon her trunk and in her heart of hearts she thought, "Some day I will have a box such as porters tremble to see; its size shall be gigantic, and it shall be full to overflowing, for I will marry a rich man who will fill it for me from his coffers!"

But the mercenary intentions of this young woman did not interfere with the sweet lilting of her song, she was still singing—

"It is purely a matter of skill,  
Which all may attain if they will,  
But every Jack he should study the knack  
If he wants to make sure of his Jill."

when the door opened, and with slow stately step and mild face, lined with an unusual anxiety, her mother entered the room. She looked at Helen with some trepidation; she was conscious of being the bearer of an unwelcome message. She was not in the least bit afraid of her impetuous daughter's anger, but she was afraid of causing any living soul one pang, nay, one prick even, of unnecessary pain. Helen could read her mother's face perfectly, she saw at once that there was something the matter. She stopped singing and began to question her.

"Mother," she said, "you have been to order the fly again, I know you have, and you have come to break the news to me, and be forgiven."

"Nay, Helen, the fly will be here in an hour's time. I ordered it at two o'clock."

"Then what is the matter? Your father is as long as a sermon."

"There is nothing the matter; but I have brought you a message. Poor Mr. Flight—

Helen stamped her foot upon the ground

"*Poor* Mr. Flight," she broke out, with a world of emphasis on the adjective. "I won't hear his name, mother, I shall put my fingers in my ears

and run down into the garden if you mention him again, I will, indeed."

"That is just where I wish you to run, my dear. The poor man is in the kitchen garden and I have promised him that you shall go to him just to bid him good-by."

An angry color, red as the rose at her bosom, suffused the girl's fair cheeks ; up went her little head in the air, her lips curved superciliously.

"Helen, dear, don't be disagreeable," her mother went on, soothingly, "you don't know what suffering such feelings entail, and the ignorance does not rebound in any way to your credit. Remember what your mother told you at breakfast the other morning. Don't be hard and don't pride yourself on your obduracy."

"Mother" she replied calmly—"if ever I am so unfortunate as to fall in love, I hope and pray, no, more, I swear, that no one shall know it. I shall have sufficient respect to keep my feelings to myself and not traipse them through dust and mire, so that any one who happens to glance my way can see them."

"When you are as other women feel you will do as women do, Nellie. Now, dear, don't keep poor Mr. Flight waiting. It isn't probable that you will ever see him again after to-day. He only asked

leave to speak to you for one moment, and I could not refuse him such a small request. You have caused him a great deal of pain hitherto. Why not wish him good-by kindly? soothe his wounded vanity by a few gracious words, they can do you no harm."

"Oh, mother, you are as soft as the dove, but not so wise as the serpent," said the girl, shaking her head and laughing. "It will be just as unpleasant for him, no matter how nicely I put it. It's a nasty, dangerous order of yours; if I am different he won't understand, and I shall have the whole business to go through again. Then I shall miss my train—to say nothing of losing my temper."

"You are heartless and unfeeling, Helen," said Mrs. Mitford, severely. "I am sure you don't inherit those faults from either your father or myself. Henry was a susceptible young man, and he was, by no means, my first lover."

"Then why do you want me to marry my first lover, mother? You didn't, and it's such a poor-spirited, mean sort of thing to do."

"Don't dawdle in this way, Helen, the delay tries poor Mr. Flight and does you no good. Go down, go down now, you will find him between the raspberries and the Jerusalem artichokes."

Then Helen, to her mother's amazement, changed her tone. She defended herself against the charge of obduracy with vehemence; she declared finally that her indifference to Mr. Flight was no sign of want of heart. Then, in a stormy frame of mind, she went to the looking-glass and smoothed her nut-brown hair, and stared resentfully at her beautiful face, until, with sulky dignity, she at length obeyed her mother, and set off to keep this distasteful tryst.

## CHAPTER II.

“Experience does take dreadfully high school wages,  
But he teaches like no other.”

CARLYLE.

THE Rectory kitchen garden was untidy—not hopelessly untidy, but somewhat neglected. Poor people’s gardens are seldom in apple-pie order. Perhaps that is the reason why poor people’s flowers flourish more luxuriantly than their better-tended brethren which are reared under the care of pruning, raking, professional gardeners. Let-alone flowers, like let-alone children, are so much more true to Nature—to the Divine Hand whence they come than are the trained and cultivated specimens.

Up and down a moss-grown gravel path, which intersected a row of ragged raspberry bushes on the one hand and a waving sea of artichoke sticks upon the other, a young man paced hurriedly. His handsome features were glum, and gloomy of expression; his mouth was weak and womanly. He hung his head and gazed upon the ground.



This was *poor* Mr. Flight, toward whom at this moment Miss Helen Mitford was slowly wending her way. Her heart beat unusually quickly as she approached; but, alas for him! it beat with an embarrassed anger—not for love. She was indignant at, and intolerant of, her lover's obstinate and importunate affection, and yet she schooled herself to patience. She would remember her parents' remarks, and endeavor to treat this distasteful passion with leniency, if not respect.

When he heard her step he turned to meet her, holding out his hands. She halted abruptly when he did so, put her hands behind her, standing in an attitude unmistakably on the defensive. She looked very cold, very unapproachable, and not at all a young lady whom it would be easy to coerce; but withal she looked so beautiful that poor Mr. Flight grew desperate.

"Helen," he cried, "Helen, you did not mean what you said? You could not be so cruel. You will not wantonly break my heart? You have come to tell me that you have changed your mind?"

"I never change my mind—at least, not without a reason. I came because my mother said she had promised you that I should come."



Neither her words nor her face were encouraging, and he knew it.

"*Never*—never change! There is no such a word as 'never' to me," he told her, mournfully, I shall continue to hope—I can not give up hope. You are not heartless. I know you are not. I shall wait. I will not despair. Why should I? For you know that winter does not last forever. If I wait spring will come."

She did not follow this meaning; she looked puzzled, and did not speak. Silence on her part was unusual, and he thought it augured well for him.

"I am in no hurry, Helen. I will be patient—I can hope on. You have only known me six months; I was foolish to expect too much. You shall see more of me, much more, and then, perhaps, you may grow to like me. Don't shake your head. What is it that you dislike in me? Tell me what pleases you, and I will endeavor—"

"Oh, don't," she interrupted; "don't say all those things over again—it is of no use. I have told you so a dozen times. I don't dislike you. Why should I?"

"If you don't dislike me, why not like me?"

"I tell you that I *do* like you"—impatently.

“Then marry me.”

“No.”

“Helen, look here. You don’t dislike me—you mean to be married some day. I have got a fair income, a good temper. I love you dearly, and I will give you your own way in everything.”

She stamped her foot on the ground and said :

“Good-by, Mr. Flight. I start at two. I can not wait here another instant.”

“Helen, listen a moment. I shall not give up hope. I shall come again. I shall be patient. You will not be so cruel as to refuse me hope—it is such a little thing to ask, Helen, your father wishes me to leave this place, to go forever. I shall go, but I shall follow you to Noelcombe. I shall come to see you, I must see you again. I can not bear to be away from you. May I come?—will you speak to me?”

“Noelcombe doesn’t belong to me,” said Miss Mitford, petulantly. “If you choose to come there I can’t help it. Good-by.”

“Then, If I come, you will speak to me?”

“Oh yes, yes, yes. Good-by.”

“Won’t you shake hands?”

Then Helen, much relieved at the thought of the approaching parting, and prompted by the memory

of her mother's suggestion, looked up with a smile into her lover's gloomy eyes and laid her cool, slender hand in his.

"Good-by," she said, with a sudden access of cordial friendliness in her clear voice; "good-by, Mr. Flight. I am so sorry I have been such a nuisance to you, but if it hadn't been me it would have been some one else, probably."

And so saying, she wrenched her hand from his hold, and, turning her back upon him, she rapidly disappeared down the gravel path and entered the house.

"Mother," she said with a rueful smile, when that lady accosted her at the garden door, "I have done as you wished. I have been so kind to Mr. Flight that he is coming down to Noelcombe to see me. He says I must see more, much more of him, and that then it will be all right. Oh, mother, why were you so foolish as to make me meet him again?—why didn't you let well alone? Bother! I have dropped that lovely red rose, and of course he picked it up. Before a week is over he will have persuaded himself that I gave it to him—I know him so well."

Mrs. Mitford did not return Helen's smile. This latest piece of intelligence was perplexing. Per-

haps her own judgment had erred on the side of kindness. If Mr. Flight fancied himself encouraged by this short interview, there would probably be a repetition of those trying scenes which had annoyed the Rector, vexed herself, maddened her daughter, and saddened the lover.

Somewhat grave, and in silence, she aided in putting the finishing touches to Helen's packing, accompanied her in the fly to the station, and saw her safely ensconced in the corner of an overcrowded and very hot third-class carriage.

This traveling third-class was a trial to the comfort-loving, proud girl. Poverty at home, where her position was assured, where every one knew that her pedigree was unimpeachable and that her own and her parents' friends ranked high in the neighborhood, was poverty stingless and bearable. She never thought or openly grumbling at the necessity of this economy, but to her mind the possession of a third-class ticket seemed a proclamation of penury—a humiliating testimony that stamped her a pauper.

A railway journey was an infliction under such circumstances. How high she held her head, how closely her lips closed, how very stately her bearing throughout the ordeal! Woe to the porter who

hustled her along?—woe to the loquacious commercial traveler who addressed her familiarly! To navies, market-women—however big their baskets or however troublesome their children—and such folk she was sweet and gracious; from the other classes of society she held herself aloof.

“There are a great many people traveling to-day, Helen,” Mrs. Mitford remarked, coming up to the carriage window at the last moment. “The station master says the train is overcrowded: there are the races at — to-morrow. If I had known it before, you should have waited until the end of the week. Good-by, dear. Don’t forget you change at Exeter. Your purse is in your bag. Write to-night. Good-by—good-by!”

With mighty puffs and hissing pants the train moved slowly out of the hot station, and Miss Mitford’s penance began. How bitter that penance would prove, she was fortunately unconscious, but even the start was sufficiently distasteful.

Nine different persons lolling in nine different attitudes overfilled the narrow carriage upon which a July sun streamed from a cloudless sky; the atmosphere therein was hot with a heavy, fiery heat, which was insufferable. Through the open window a stifling showers of dust, sand, and blacks,

that powdered the faces and clothes of the travelers.

It was too hot for Helen to read or doze, or watch the dazzling landscape reeling past; her companions were not of prepossessing appearance, but from beneath the shadow of her broad-brimmed hat she investigated them. Beside her sat a lean man, whose garb proclaimed him a dissenting minister, and whose fixed and benignant smile declared him to be impervious alike to the discomforts of the weather and to the inferiority of his fellows. A smart young woman in a green beige gown, and wearing a large cotton-velvet hat, from which long feathers, dank and curlless from the heat, trailed spiritlessly, sat in the corner opposite Helen. She held *Modern Society*, that paper dear to the servants' hall, in her soiled, gloveless hands; but she was not reading, she was half-asleep; now and again she opened her eyes and glanced with a swift, keen glance at Miss Mitford. Beyond this girl a spruce man, very neat and trim, leaned languidly against the unyielding cushions at his back in an attitude which was probable an exact imitation of his master's. He was a servant, Helen decided—a gentleman's gentleman—a valet. The remainder of the company belonged to that unattractive portion of



humanity, the third-class racing man, whose personal appearance, let us charitably conclude, is the worst part of him, for the task of finding a step balks the imagination.

The intense heat was so enervating, the glare was so intolerable, that Helen soon lay back in her corner of the carriage and, covering her aching eyes with her hand, abandoned herself to a don't-care lassitude, which took interest in no one or nothing. The train by which she was traveling was express ; it would stop only at —, where the races were to be held, and at Exeter, at which place she had to change both train and platform. Helen was usually an anxious traveler, but that day she was conscious only of the melting atmosphere and her own smarting eyelids and many discomforts.

Once or twice Helen uncovered her eyes to draw out her watch, but, after glancing at it, with an impatient sigh, she replaced it in her belt, depressed at finding how slowly the lagging time crept past. This watch of hers was a cherished possession ; on her twentieth birthday it had been given her by a rich and favorite uncle, and it was the only piece of valuable jewelry she owned. It was an enameled hunter, small, and of exquisite workmanship ; her initials, H. M., were traced in diamonds upon the



case. The eyes, both of the spruce man and of the tawdy young woman, were caught by the glitter of the brilliants, and each looked with some renewed curiosity at its owner.

The dust, the glare, the intolerable heat, became each moment more unendurable; it was a vast relief to leave the dazzling sunshine and rush, though only for three minutes, into a dark and comparatively cool tunnel. Helen's eyes were still shielded by her hand, and she was leaning back in her corner.

"Allow me to pull up the window, Miss," said the lean man, getting up as he spoke to fulfill his suggestion, "for the smoke is something awful."

"Thank you," said she, shrinking as far as possible from the speaker.

"It is a warm day," the smart young lady opposite remarked, mincingly.

"I call it 'ot," said the dissenting minister, still busy with the window.

"You have knocked the paper out of my hand, sir," remonstrated the smart young lady, with indignation. "I should be obliged if you would be a *little* more careful."

"No offense; if I knocked it down I'll pick it up.

No damage done and no time wasted, for you can't see to read in the dark."

The tone of the discussion was pugnacious; Helen was alarmed lest the difference might lead to a quarrel; such a quarrel would be most unpleasant. Hot as she had been before, she grew still hotter at this prospect. But her fears were groundless, though there was some excitement as the two combatants stooped at the same moment—their heads consequently coming in sharp contact—to pick up *Modern Society*. Neither lost their temper; on the contrary, they first apologized and then laughed with praiseworthy amiability.

Just after this occurrence the train slackened speed, and after emerging from the tunnel drew up alongside the platform of —, where the racing men, the dissenting minister, and the smart young lady presently alighted, leaving Helen and the gentleman's gentleman sole occupants of the carriage.

Helen drew a long sigh of relief as they departed, even though she thought it probable that the man with whom she was now alone would prove either a drunkard, or a lunatic, or, at the best, a hypnotist. She surveyed him furtively from beneath her lashes; he did not look *very* dangerous, and as he soon moved to the corner of the compartment most dis-

tant from her, put his feet on the opposite seat, took off his hat and opened a thin pinkish paper, in the perusal of which he was speedily engrossed, she gradually composed her nerves.

Indeed he was so motionless, he yawned so sanely, and was altogether such a reassuring companion, that she shortly forgot both her fears and his presence, and with her head bolstered against the uneasy cushion behind her, with her chin up-tilted, with her weary body swaying at each motion of the carriage, she was rocked by degrees into a deep, dreamless slumber. The sun poured on her pale face from which the heat had sucked all vestige of color, her long lashes swept the delicate curve of her cheeks, her slim hands, ringless, bare, and very white, lay clasped upon her lap.

Once or twice the man lowered the pinkish paper to his knee, and turned his shrewd eyes inquisitively upon her. He was a discriminating and observant person, and he was puzzled how to allot this "sleeping beauty" her right place in the social scale. She was too spirited and self-reliant for a governess, and she was too poorly clad to be a genuine West-ender traveling thus humbly by way of novelty, and yet his educated eyes recognized her as a lady bred and born.

The express had entered among the wooded vales and gentle hills of South Devonshire, before Helen, with a sudden start, awoke. A piercing whistle had aroused her. She sat upright, set her hat straight, passed her hands carefully over her ruffled hair, adjusted her collar and cuffs, and yawned. Her unobtrusive companion was still reading his paper, and did not look up.

The fiery sun still streamed down on the melting country, the burning air was stifling, clouds of fine dust floated in the track of the train.

Wondering how long a space of time she had cheated from this purgatory in sleep, Helen put her hot hand down to her belt and felt for her watch. It was not there ! Dangling from a button of her bodice hung her short watch chain, but though the swivel of the chain was unbroken, the watch was no longer attached to it ; while she had slept it had, it must have become, unfastened. It was the first time such an accident had happened.

Startled at this discovery she began to search hurriedly, with eager finger, behind her waist-belt for the missing treasure, but she searched in vain. No watch was there. Then, as a last hope, she unbuckled her belt, took it off, shook it violently, as though she fancied that the watch might, by a

superb conjuring trick, have been concealed in the leather, and cried, in a tragic voice of despair—

“It has gone !”

Meanwhile, unobserved, by the preoccupied girl, the train had stopped, the whistle which had awakened her, had heralded the vicinity of Exeter.

Cries of “Tickets ready !” were now to be heard approaching; but Helen heard nothing.

“Have you lost anything, ma’am ?” the shrewd-faced man inquired, with respectful interest.

“My watch,” she answered breathlessly. “I looked at it just now—I had it in the carriage here—it has *gone* !”

Rising to her feet she shook her serge skirt, she stooped to look under the seats, she minutely examined the cracks of the dust-strewed, dirty floor, she peered into possible and impossible places, but she did not find her watch. Her companion assisted in the search. As they were thus engaged, the door was opened, and a porter, hot, and consequently cross, demanded “Tickets” gruffly.

Helen’s little traveling-bag lay on the seat, she took it up—it was already open—and looked into it. It was empty, her purse had gone ! In stunned amazement she stared, speechless, at the ticket collector.

"Look sharp, Miss," he said, imperiously, to this dawdling third-class passenger, who seemed to consider his time of no more value than her own. Neither his tone nor her discovery tended to soothe Miss Mitford's feelings. The purse containing her ticket was gone, she had placed in her bag, which she had carefully shut. The bag was wide open now and empty. Her cherished watch, all her money, and her ticket, were alike lost. Here was an overwhelming calamity !

The short familiar tones of the porter braced her courage by rousing her indignation ; if she had not been annoyed, it was possible that these misfortunes, combined with the overpowering heat of the day, might have affected her to tears. As it was she held out the open and empty bag toward the porter with tragic dignity.

"My purse was in this bag when I left Meriton Station," she said, with dismay in her voice, "and," touching the dangling watch-chain, "my watch was fastened firmly to this chain. Both my purse and my watch are gone; I have lost them both, but how, or where, or when, I have not the slightest idea."

"Stolen," said the porter, shortly.

Helen looked thunderstruck, and the shrewd-eyed man nodded like a Mandarin.



"The young lady was wearing a very handsome watch set with brilliants," he volunteered, addressing the porter. "It was an enameled hunter as far as I could see from where I sat in the carriage. She took it out and looked at it more than once before we reached ——"

"Do you know the lady?" inquired the porter, looking hard at the man. "Are you acquainted? Is she a friend of yours?"

"I have never seen the young lady in my life until to-day. I was in the train when she got in at Meriton."

Then the porter leaned out of the carriage and called loudly for "Bill," who, in the shape of another porter, presently arrived, accompanied by the guard and a policeman, by whom Helen was questioned closely, and by whom her companion was keenly scrutinized. The train which had halted outside the station in order that the tickets might be collected, now proceeded into St. David's station, the policeman and "Bill" remaining in the carriage, the former still cross-examining Miss Mitford and keeping a watchful eye on the man. Helen told her short story concisely; she was not the kind of woman who outwardly loses her head or grows confused in an unpleasant emergency; though, in

truth, she was frightened and miserable at heart, she preserved a dignity of manner calculated to freeze her interrogators.

When the train drew up alongside the crowded Exeter platform, the man with whom Helen had traveled collected his belongings and was about to leave the carriage, had not the policeman interposed, civilly enough, but decidedly.

"I am sorry, sir, but we shall want to speak to you. The circumstances are not altogether satisfactory, I'm afraid. Before reaching — this lady looked at her watch, it was safe then. She falls asleep almost immediately on leaving —, you were alone in the carriage with her; when she awakes the watch is gone, likewise the purse. The circumstances, as you'll allow, are not satisfactory, and it is my duty to sift them to the bottom."

The man turned first red and then very pale.

"Then you suspect me of *stealing*?" he demanded, and the dismay in his voice touched Helen; she turned her gray eyes compassionately upon him.

"I am quite sure *he* did not do it," she said, quickly, addressing the policeman.

"Thank you, ma'am," said the man.

"What reason have you for saying that Miss?" inquired the policeman, sternly.

"I can see he is an honest man," Helen answered; her feminine logic was not convincing.

"She had none other than a woman's reason,  
She thought him so, because she thought him so."

The policeman smiled grimly.

"He will have to prove himself an honest man by turning out his pockets for one thing, and giving a satisfactory account of himself for another. Will you kindly oblige me with your name, sir, your business, and your destination?"

"No difficulty about the one or the other. My name is Smithers, William Smithers, native of Barford, county of Warwick. I'm a gentleman's servant, valet to Mr. Albert Jones, who is traveling in a first-class smoking-compartment in the front part of this train. We are on our way to Newton Hall, Noelcombe, North Devon, the seat of Sir Adolphus Jones, Knight—father to my master."

The policeman listened to this explanation attentively, then turned with a wise and skeptical smile to Bill.

"We must find this Mr. Albert Jones, Bill," he said.

At that moment there hurried past the carriage window, a tall good-looking young man whose face was wrinkled with a frown, and who scanned the crowd upon the platform in evident and impatient search for some one whose duty it was to be found.

"That is my master," cried Mr. Smithers, with a note of triumph in his voice.

"Ask the gentleman to step here a moment," said the policeman, addressing "Bill."

"I must get out," Helen said, desperately. "I have to change trains here, I can not wait."

"We must settle up this matter, before you go, Miss."

"Then we must settle it outside, on the platform. I can not stay here."

As she spoke, "Bill," accompanied by the gentleman, reached the door, which stood open. This Mr. Albert Jones was of prepossessing appearance. He was a handsome, prosperous, genial, young man. His easy temper was very seldom ruffled, indeed a less contented man than he could have found little to grumble at in his smooth and golden path. But just now he looked hot and irritated, and he spoke angrily.

"What on earth is all this about, Smithers? Why on earth will you travel third when I pay for

your second-class ticket? You are so infernally economical that you deserve to be locked up?" Then catching sight of Helen's figure from behind the policeman, whither she had withdrawn on his approach, he went on with charitable interest and some condescension. "If that is the person who fancies Smithers has got her purse, I can assure her that she's mistaken. Smithers don't rob me so I am sure he would not rob her. But if she can't get home without a ticket, I hope she will allow me to provide her with any money she may want."

This open-handed generosity, this convenient suggestion should surely have been received with gratitude and thanks, but exasperated, robbed, proud Helen chose to be offended. With the mein of an affronted princess she pushed her way past the policeman and answered this overbearing gentleman with extraordinary dignity and coldness.

"I did not think that your man had stolen my things. I knew he had not. And I want nothing but to be allowed to leave the carriage. Would you kindly let me pass?"

## CHAPTER III.

“ Whose humble means watch not  
His haughty spirit.” SHAKESPEARE.

MISS Mitford's voice, face and manner were so unexpected as to be a little startling. But the young man instantly stood aside and raised his hat with an ingratiating smile. He smiled, not because he found her manner amusing, but because it was his habit to smile where women were concerned. They were always so very gracious to him that he had never yet found occasion to frown in their company. He half offered his hand to help her to alight from the carriage but he was just a moment too late, she was already on the platform.

She found that the train to Noelcombe was behind its time, it would not be in for half an hour. During the earlier part of that interval, Smithers, who was now exonerated from suspicion, and Helen, formed the nucleus of a group consisting of several officials, the policeman and Smithers's master, who, to that young person's annoyance, had entered with



officious interest into the discussion concerning her loss. He was a young man of some energy, and energy to those who live idle lives in a superfluous possession of which they are glad to find opportunity to rid themselves. Besides which Miss Mitford was an unusually pretty girl and in distress. So he took the investigation of the affair into his own hands, directed every measure which was adopted for the recovery of the property, asked a hundred questions and showed some talent for the detective trade.

The cross-examination to which she was compelled to submit was not the least unpleasant part of this unfortunate day. At length, the subject, exhaustive as it proved, was brought to an abrupt conclusion by the arrival of the Plymouth Zulu. Helen withdrew to the ladies' waiting-room where she sat, sulking, in the stifling heat of that crowded room. She was cross, hot, tired, but she was glad to escape from her undesirable notoriety and still more glad to be quit of the persistent gaze and searching interrogations of that complacent son of the low-born, purse-proud Sir Adolphus Jones, whose condescending attentions were intolerable.

She, whose family-tree reared its distant branches into the most lofty circles, she, whose ancestors

(like all other orthodox ancestors) came over with the Conqueror, she, whose pride was cultured and excessive, had been found in humiliating third-class circumstances by this first-class passenger. Such an offense could not be lightly condoned. The freedom of his earlier remarks, his masterful patronage and officious arrangement of her business were all alike distasteful.

He was so unconscious of his offenses, so certain of her gratitude, and so good-humoredly assured of his supreme authority, that she felt helpless in his hands. She heard him tell the officials "that as he too was going to Noelcombe by the next train, he would look after the lady and see that she reached her journey's end in safety," and could find no reason for remonstrating at, or contradicting his assertion.

Beggars can not be choosers, and it is generally understood that they should be most grateful for any favor, however small, which is thrust upon them. Indeed, Helen was glad—truly thankful—to be spared the discomfort necessarily attending a journey which was to be performed without ticket, money or companion.

Beneath an armor of pride which counterfeited self-reliance, Helen concealed a courage no stouter

and nerves no tougher than those owned by her gentler sisters ; her braveness and her composure were but skin-deep. When a porter came into the waiting-room and told her that the train in which she was to travel was due, and when she found her self-elected conductor awaiting her at the door, she was glad of his protection.

“The train won’t be in for ten minutes,” he said, at once. “I hope you don’t mind my having sent for you, but I thought you would like a cup of tea, or something before you go on.”

Could anything be kinder or more considerate? The very words, “a cup of tea,” are refreshing to the female sex. Helen’s head ached, and she realized that she was extremely thirsty ; she imagined the comfort of a cup of tea, and yet she preferred her thirst and her weariness to accepting another favor at the hands of this stranger.

He was looking at her intently, rather more intently than he would have looked, perhaps, had he found her in less humble circumstances. He had decided that she was a governess—a young, much-to-be-pitied dependent, on her way to her work, where she would waste her beauty in a dull school-room among lesson books and naughty children. He was intensely compassionate over her fate.

Unfortunately, she was slightly uncouth and abrupt, but no doubt she was shy and a little overwhelmed by the interest he had evinced in her misfortunes.

Mr. Jones, young, good-looking, popular among his fellow-men, and heir to a prodigious income, was not likely to be humble or blind to his own advantages.

The kind maidens and their still kinder mothers, with whom he came in contact at every stage of his life, had flattered and cajoled him into the belief that his personal attractions were irresistible. Of the more substantial attractions which he possessed they were evidently oblivious, and he, to do him justice, did not suspect his guileless flatterers of ulterior designs, but accepted their proffered friendship with frank pleasure, ascribing his popularity with the fair sex to any reason and every reason but the right one. He had proved himself neither a susceptible nor a sentimental person. It has been said that there "is safety in numbers," and Mr. Jones admired a very great many damsels very much. Many dovecotes had been fluttered, many hopes had been raised by the marked, but meaningless attentions, which he so impartially bestowed.

With an appreciative eye, he noted the beauty of

Miss Mitford's graceful figure; the turn of her throat, the erect pose of her head, the length of her curly lashes, the dimple that cleft her round chin, and the curve of her short, upper lip. She was more than pretty—she was beautiful, and just the style of girl whom he admired; he wished to see more of her; he would like to hear her talk. How silent she was, and how solemn—saddened, no doubt, by her depressing position. He would like to see her smile; her smile ought to be very sweet; there was a suspicion of a dimple indenting her pale cheek. How white, how travel-soiled, how grave she looked: He was so sorry for her. But her conduct was disappointing, for she, with frigid politeness, refused his offer of tea, and turned to re-enter the ladies' waiting-room.

“Why not wait here?” he inquired, earnestly.

“I should like to rest until the train is in,” with what he called her unfortunate governess manner.

“You can rest out here,” pointing to an adjacent bench; “there is more air out here. It is much better for you than being stifled among all those women. Do come, you are looking so awfully done up, and I will bring you a cup of tea down here.”

But the waiting-room door had closed behind her before his sentence was ended, It was evident that she was very *gauche*. but it was also evident to her observant and good-natured companion that she was tired out ; he was convinced that she had refused his offer from some other motive than disinclination for the proffered refreshment.

“It is an awkward thing for a shy girl to accept anything from a strange fellow,” he reflected. “I was clumsy : I must manage it better. She shall have her tea, I swear, for I know she is dying for it,” and he walked off to the refreshment-room.

A few minutes later, a maid, accompanied by Smithers, and carrying tea, cake, biscuit, and a plate filled with white-heart cherries, entered the ladies’ waiting-room. There, at Smither’s direction, the tray was placed on the table by Helen’s side, with the words—

“The gentleman desired me to bring these, ma’am.”

The retreating figure showed no consciousness of Helen’s quick disclaimer—

“It is a mistake. I ordered nothing—I want nothing.”

The tea and those seductive cherries stood un-



tasted at this foolish girl's elbow ; she looked at them wistfully, but she touched them not. When her train came into the station, she felt that she was turning her back on a terrible temptation, as she bustled out upon the crowded platform, where she was immediately joined by Mr. Jones.

"This way if you please. I've got you a carriage. My man will see to your luggage ; it is with mine."

And he hustled her on till they reached an empty compartment, the door of which was held open by Smithers.

"I am traveling third," she said, glancing within the carriage. "This is first."

"The man--the who-do-you-call it at the ticket office"--stammering over the prevarication--"gave me a first-class ticket for you."

[As indeed he had done, and had been paid for it, too.]

"Thank you, but I like third best ; it—it is coolest."

"As you please." This girl was less shy than disagreeable after all. "I am going in there," indicating the smoking-carriage next door, "so you would get this place to yourself. The rest of the train is very much crowded."

Helen hesitated. She believed that the white ticket which he held had been provided by the generosity of the railway company; she also believed that by a fortunate coincidence—not by bribery and corruption—the selected compartment happened to be empty—the only empty compartment in the full train.

Smithers, with respectful mien, patiently held the door open. “Take your seat!” shouted a porter at her elbow. An eager crowd of excited excursionists surged past; a drunken man staggered close to her. Mr. Jones said nothing, but preserved an indifferent air. The drunken man settled the question. Helen shrunk away in disgust from him, and saying, “I really think I will go in here,” entered the carriage precipitately, and with some loss of dignity.

“There was an excursion to Exeter from Barnstaple to-day,” Mr. Jones explained. “They go back by this train. We shall get rid of the crowd there.”

He was standing on the platform, still with his hand on the sill of the open window. He was thinking that it would have been pleasanter to travel with this handsome girl than to smoke next door. He was in search of an excuse to change his mind and join her. Miss Mitford, with a calm and unap-

proachable mien, returned his steady gaze. An excuse was not easy to find, but just before the train started he gave her an inkling of his intention by his last words—

“You will find some papers in there if you care to look at them. I shall see you again at Barnstaple ; I shall have done my smoke by that time. *Au revoir.*”

“He means to travel with me from Barnstaple to Noelcombe,” Helen concluded, closing her lips tight and not looking amiable.

That is precisely what he had meant, and what he also proceeded to do.

At Barnstaple he entered the carriage, as though it was a matter of course that he should do so, and taking the seat opposite to its occupant, he said—

“I hope you don’t mind my coming in here ? There was such a lot of men in the other carriage that they smoked me out.”

She made some inarticulate sound which suggested her indifference to his movements.

A pile of illustrated papers lay, where he had placed them, beside her on the seat. He pointed at them, and asked whether she had been reading.

“It is too hot to read,” she said.

"Perhaps you are one of the people who can never read in a train?"

"I read sometimes."

"It makes your head ache, perhaps?"

"Yes, it does."

"Does it make your head ache to look at pictures?"

"No"—a moment's pause; "but talking makes my head ache."

"I'm so sorry; that is particularly unfortunate, for I have a question or two which I really must ask you. You see, I ought to have a full description of your watch and purse, a minute account of your fellow-travelers—every particular, in fact, of the circumstances to send up to headquarters as soon as possible. I am sorry to trouble you, but I want it down in black and white; it would not do to trust to *my* memory in any important business."

He drew out a book—it might have been a notebook—and pencil from his breast pocket, and began in a business-like way to question Helen, and write down her answers. She was impressed by his manner and set at ease by this explanation of his intrusion.

"Your name?"

"Helen Mitford."

"You came from Meriton, you said—started about 2:30? How far do you live from the station?"

"Two miles."

He entered this important item carefully.

"Meriton is a pretty village," he remarked. "I have often passed through it on my way to Dromore."

Helen started and, looked at him.

"You know Dromore?" he pursued.

"Yes."

"The Chilterns are awfully nice people."

Lady Chiltern was Helen's cousin and most intimate friend; but she had grown frigid again, for what had the Chilterns to do with the notebook, or the theft?

"Would you kindly describe your fellow-travelers?" he proceeded, with solemnity, his pencil poised in the air and his dark eyes watching her expressive face.

"A thin, middle-aged man—I thought he was a dissenting minister—sat next to me. There was a woman—a smart woman with feathers and dirty hands—opposite to me. The other people were men; I hardly looked at them. I could not recognize either of them."

“Poor men !” murmured the gentleman, writing in his book.

This superfluity of the dialogue was a mistake on his part. A delicate color rose to Helen’s cheek ; she averted her eyes and her attention from her *vis-a-vis*, and fixed them on the landscape. The scenery through which they were passing was magnificent. Great hills, topped with rugged bowlders of gray granite, clothed with short turf on which droves of horned sheep were browsing, streaked and belted with woods of oak and ash, rose almost perpendicularly from out the smiling valleys.

In those valleys herds of the copper-red Devon cows cropped the meadows, acres of young, pale corn undulated in the mild breeze. Scarlet-tiled farms, with groups of yellowish ricks for sentinels, were scattered here and there. A wide river, between high banks, gleamed in the sun.

Helen was keenly alive to beauty ; she loved the country, and the sight of the matchless landscape of North Devon was a revelation of wonder and delight. It left her capable of no sensation but one of pure and perfect enjoyment.

Mr. Jones was not wanting in penetration. He replaced his note-book with a smile at his own expense, for he soon saw that his companion’s atten-



tion was absorbed by the scenery, at which she was gazing with rapture in her eyes, a pleased smile rippled her mouth, and that she had forgotten him.

He was an admirer of fine scenery himself—woods, as coverts, and mountain streams as harbors for trout, were always particularly interesting to him ; but while Miss Mitford looked out of the window he looked at her, not at the landscape. They were approaching Noelcombe, where they must separate, and he had made no way with her. If he allowed her to leave him thus, it was probable that he should see her no more, therefore it was that he must draw her attention to himself once more. Hitherto he had found, with her amiable sex, such a task wonderfully easy.

He began again, with pencil and note-book, his examination and cross-examination on the well-worn topic. This was, of course, a little tiresome, but Helen answered with great precision and accuracy, and with her eyes on the window.

“ Oh, look,” she suddenly cried, with a deep-drawn breath of happiness, pointing through the open window, “ there is the sea.”

A blue and wrinkled belt of water glittered between a cleft hill, at the sight of which Mr. Jones, on being thus accosted, expressed rapture.

"Have you never been here before?"

"Never."

"It is such a ripping little place, I know you will love it. Whereabouts in Noelcombe are you staying?"

"I don't know exactly where the house is."

"I might have to see you, don't you know, about this business; I may have forgotten to ask you some important question, so I ought to know your address."

"My aunt lives at Carnation Cottage."

For some time his governess theory about her had been wavering : it now expired.

"How long shall you be down?" he asked, anxiously.

"I do not know."

"You will be here until the week after next?"

"Oh, yes."

"I shall probably hear something from the railway company in a few days ; in that case I will call and tell you what they say—that is, if you will allow me to do so."

"Thank you ; you are very kind."

The words were unimpeachable, but the tone in which they were uttered was not encouraging.

"We shall be very lucky if we can hear of either watch or purse again."

The "we" was very offensive to Miss Mitford.

"Yes, the recovery of things lost in that way is so unlikely that I am exceedingly sorry that you troubled yourself at all about the matter."

She was very dignified and grand, but he was not awed.

"It is the sort of search I like," he said frankly ; "I shall be as proud as Lucifer if I can trace them. If it can be done, it shall be done, I promise you."

"I can't see how you are going to do it."

"Leave it to me," he told her, with a smile of superior wisdom. And then he diplomatically began to extol the glorious country through which they were passing. There was Morte Point, there the merciful lighthouse which guarded the ships off that sharp peninsula of jagged rocks, there was the famous Toro, there a Druidical stone, there a cromlech. If his geography was inaccurate, Helen did not discover it, but listened to what he said with interest and smiled upon him.

But when the travelers reached Noelcombe Road poor Helen discovered that the misfortunes of that unlucky day were not yet over. With a culpable

want of forethought, Mr. Jones desired her to interview station master and ticket collector in his presence. Out came his note-book again, and the tedious routine of endless questions which she had already answered had to be repeated. At the time the useless delay fretted her, but when at last she was free, and, on emerging from the station, found that omnibuses and cabs had alike started for Noelcombe, leaving her and her box five miles from her destination, she was dismayed and ready to cry.

“Why didn’t you fetch me?” she inquired, miserably, of a porter; “you saw me here, you knew I was going to Noelcombe. Why did you let the omnibus start without me?”

“I understood you were along of Mr. Jones, Miss,” the man said; “you came up in the train along o’ him. His man went on in the cab, but the dogcart is outside waiting.”

At this moment Mr. Jones himself approached and asked Helen anxiously what was wrong. When she had explained her position and this culminating misfortune, he was extremely concerned. He rated the porter with great severity and used unparliamentary language about the thick heads of the west-country people.

“However,” he added, turning to Helen with a courtly and ingenuous air, “it is fortunate that my cart is here, for, as I am going your way, I need not tell you how pleased I shall be to drive you to Carnation Cottage.”

His manner was very happy. If Helen had not, by an abrupt turn of her head, caught sight of a meaning grin on the face of the porter, she would most likely have complied gratefully with this suggestion, but that grin aroused a suspicion in her mind that determined her immediate action.

It would have been a relief to have said something *really rude* to this presumptuous, low-born stranger; her eyes were dangerously bright, she was very angry. With a meaningless inclination of the head she waived the question, and, turning, re-entered the station. After giving the station master succinct orders for the forwarding of her box at the earliest opportunity, she inquired of him her way to Noelcombe, and then, without looking to the right hand or the left, set off at a rapid pace in the direction indicated.

A few minutes later the unconscious offender, Mr. Jones, climbed into his cart and drove off after the dark figure, which was already at some distance

from him, and upon which he kept his eyes. He wondered why she would not start with him ; perhaps she was shy of the people at the station. She had not seemed a bashful young woman ; no doubt that studiously cold way of hers was a form of shyness. He would wait until she turned the corner of the road, and was consequently out of sight of the station, before he picked her up.

How well and how quickly she moved. Neither heat nor weariness beat down her erect head ; how high she held it. Her shoulders were rigid as she walked ; there was no undulation, nothing gentle, nor drooping about her ; she had an uncompromising back. The sun was low in the west, the air was cooler than it had been all day, a freshening evening breeze had arisen, yet how pale she looked. Poor girl she was tired out. He touched the horse with the whip, and next moment was alongside of her and addressing her by name.

“ Miss Mitford, you went off in such a hurry ; you had gone in a moment, before I knew where you were. Please get in as quick as you can, the horse won’t stand.” He leaned over the splash-board and offered her his hand to help her into the cart.



"Thank you, but I'm going to walk to Noel-combe," she answered, moving on as she spoke. He caught sight of her face; there was animosity in every line of it.

"You can't walk," he said, "it would kill you. It's five miles—more—and an awful road—hills the whole way—hills like a switchback."

She did not argue, but she walked on faster; he kept the cart by her side.

"I assure you that you can't walk," he said, a little irritated and very much surprised. "You don't understand, I am not exaggerating—it is five miles if it is a step. You don't know what that distance in this part of the country means. You must get in—indeed, you must; you are tired out already."

"Thank you, but I would rather walk were the distance ten times greater than it is."

"Under those circumstances I have nothing more to say."

And, taking off his hat with great ceremony, Mr. Jones drove off, leaving an irritating cloud of dust in his track.

Before the cart was out of sight Helen had repented her decision.

"I was a fool," she said, "it would have been

better to have driven with a butcher or a hangman than this."

"This" was a long, steep, stony hill, which stretched before her.

## CHAPTER IV.

Long lines of cliff breaking have left a chasm ;  
And in the chasm are foam and yellow sands ;  
Beyond, red roofs about a narrow wharf  
In cluster; then a molder'd church, and high  
A long street climbs—

ENOCH ARDE

NOELCOMBE was just such another fishing-hamlet as that home of Philip, Enoch, and Annie, above described ; but its one narrow street, after clambering half-way up the broken cliff-side, was met and lost in row after row of neat, newly-built lodging-houses.

Marine Parade, Sea View Terrace, and West Cliff Place, daily disgorged, during the season, an innumerable army of “visitors,” for whose summer sea-blow these houses had been lately erected by the great patron of the village, Sir Adolphus Jones, who, in a speculative way, appreciated the attractive beauty of the place.

The old residents of Noelcombe and its neighborhood—among whose number Sir Adolphus was not—conservative to the backbone, regarded those

horizontal rows of remunerative houses, and that enormous mansion, flanked by acres of glass, and oversmart, alike in color and design, in the middle distance, with distinct disfavor.

But the county patronized Sir Adolphus and his family; rich neighbors who owned an eligible son, daughters, too, sufficiently good looking, and more than sufficiently dowered, who kept open house where champagne flowed like water, where a French cook presided in the sumptuous kitchen, where your presence was eagerly welcomed, and where your wit was sure to be appreciated, were acquaintances to be cultivated.

If the house was new, it was none the less luxurious on that account. So the county smiled good-humoredly, at Lady Jones's *faux-pas*, replaced Sir Adolphus's H's when they could surreptitiously do so, shot his coverts, fished his rivers, sailed in his yacht, and ate his dinners, availing themselves, without stint, of his hospitality. This condescension toward this patronage of the Joneses by the great people around, astonished their humbler neighbors, who could trace a very decent descent for themselves and knew no difficulties of H's or etiquette, but to whom neither great people nor upstart Joneses paid attention or respect.

To neither section—the Jones-patronizers nor the Jones-detesters—did Miss Elizabeth Mitford belong, for beyond the inclosing cob-walls of her garden she had no interests worthy of the name. With the exception of the mice which fed on her bulbs and crocus, the slugs, snails, wood-lice and wire-worms that she slew with pitiless ferocity, or those errand boys who wantonly sloshed the lovely heads from off the juicy stalks of her tulips, or who, by leaving the gate open, allowed strange dogs to enter her domain and ravish her flower-beds, she regarded all humanity with placid benevolence.

Above the winding village street, above the highest horizontal row of offending “apartments” (from which it was separated by a wooded glen), nestling down against a background of tall trees, stood *Carnation Cottage*, the dainty home of this gentle maiden lady who lived her guileless life surrounded by, and existing for, her flowers.

The house was a large, many-roomed cottage; the porch door opened into a square hall, which was furnished as a room, the narrow bay windows of the miniature drawing-room were shaded by overhanging creepers; above, latticed windows, fringed with flowers, were tucked away unevenly beneath the eaves of the thatched roof.

Miss Elizabeth Mitford was in face, disposition, and in manner, a mild caricature of her brother, the Rector.

Her gray hair was arranged in rows of graduated curls on either side of her tanned and weather-beaten face, her long nose dipped over a wide mouth that curled up at the corners with a bland contentedness which was almost, but not quite, a smile; her chin receded, and her over-arched eyebrows wrinkled her forehead deeply, and left her round blue eyes wide open.

She was indifferent to her appearance but not to her comfort. For the sake of shade, she wore a wide-brimmed straw hat, bound, for the sake of security, with a black ribbon beneath her chin. For the sake of coolness, she wore a light chintz gown, fashioned with a view to ease, not elegance; for the sake of convenience, she wore no gloves.

I have described her in her gardening garb, and as she spent the greater part of each day in this pursuit, and often snatched an hour from the night for murderous sallies on slugs—which is a form of gardening—this was her perpetual summer costume.

She took no interest in herself, she lavished all her care upon the beautifying of her house and gar-



den, and, no doubt, she was wise in doing so, for they repaid her attention better than her old face and bent figure could have done, however deftly decorated by art. Her little rooms were the prettiest, and brightest, and cosiest imaginable, their windows, too, commanded a glorious view of the cove [wherein the sea swept from cliff to cliff] and a wide stretch of neutral sand out of which great rocks thrust their dark ribs and cast black shadows on the beach.

The atmosphere within a hundred yards of Carnation cottage was redolent of flowers ; the round grass plot before the house was edged and sprinkled with beds that were thick with blossom.

A small conservatory which opened out of the drawing-room, was a complete blaze of color. Miss Mitford's plants seemed to understand and respond to their owner's love, and half-killed themselves to gratify her by their profuse bloom.

The trellised walls of the cottage were concealed by creeping fuchsias, and myrtles, which were trained so as to completely cover them. Against the house was a broad bed of poppies, their scarlet and yellow petals caught the rays of the sinking sun. On the window ledges were tiled boxes filled with mignonette, lobelias, and marguerites. An old-

fashioned border of hollyhocks, sunflowers, sweet peas, candy-tuft, honesty, balsams, phloxes, and pansies edged the gravel walk that swept round the grass plot and led to the gate through which Carnation Cottage was reached. This gate was no smart entrance, but a green door let into the cob wall ; by its side was a bell-handle mounted on a brass plate, on which the direction, " Ring and walk in " was engraved.

On the center of the lawn a tulip tree and a standard magnolia grew side by side, beneath them stood a rustic garden seat on which Miss Mitford was now sitting ; she held her watch in her hand, at which she glanced every now and then, with evident anxiety. Presently she rose, and bustling over to the garden door she opened it and prowled out upon the road, thence she soon returned very breathless and with an increased anxiety depicted on her face. She then hurried into the house calling " Betsey."

People who are desperate use desperate remedies, and if Betsey was not a *desperate* remedy, she was at least an old servant, who, though she was wont to say, " she knew her place," did not keep it, but tyrannized over her gentle Mistress as a " valuable servant " alone knows how to do.

When Miss Mitford had repeated her call for "Betsey" several times, she recollected that Betsey was always conscientiously deaf to a call and only responded to a summons from the bell. So she rang, and then paced to and fro the hall, looking now at the grandfather's clock in the corner, now at the flowers on the table.

An old woman, lean as a rook, with hard, black eyes, and a mouth which twisted down with a curl at the corners, opened a side door and came into the hall.

"Look at the time, Betsey," cried her mistress, pointing at the clock and shaking her head. "See how late it is, and that dear child has not yet arrived. I begin to feel sure something has happened. I have been uneasy all day, no doubt a presentiment of misfortune and—"

"Thunder in the air, ma'am," interrupted Betsey, "and tying up them carnations in a blazing sun is enough to give presentiments to mummies."

"John tells me that the omnibus came in half an hour ago," pursued Miss Mitford, almost crying. "The flies are even fleetier than the omnibuses. Dear me, dear me, the more I think, the more anxious I become. Betsey, where *can* that poor girl be?"

“Miss Helen is a young lady who can take good care of herself, ma’am, better than many twice and thrice her age. Her head is fit for use as well as for ornament, and she holds it high.”

With Betsey the absent were always right—the present wrong—Miss Elizabeth hardly heard her words, she sprang up from her seat and wrung her hands, fearful misgivings began to crowd upon her anxious mind.

“These are dreadful days, Betsey,” she said, “the papers teem with horrors. I live so safely here that I do not consider the dangers of others less blessed than myself. Those terrible murderers cut their victims into small portions and throw them here and there over the hedges.”

Betsey possessed the nineteenth-century weakness—a perniciously skeptical mind ; she even went to the length of occasionally doubting the infallible truth of what she read “on the paper,” so now, instead of sharing her companion’s fears, she smiled, an acrid, superior smile.

“So we hear, ma’am, but we don’t see nothing of such things down in these respectable parts, and as for Miss Helen being murdered and made away with, I’d be sorry for the ruffian who attempted it !”

“Ah, Betsey, don’t we often, you and I, see a strong ship sail down the bay one morning,” cried poor Miss Elizabeth, pointing with a tragic gesture to the sea, “and a few hours later, alas, where is she? A wreck, a wreck! Because we can’t see the sunken rock upon which she founders, does that save her? Oh, dear, dear, I am so anxious!”

“If you go on like this, ma’am, fitting Miss Helen into parables like the parson, you will upset yourself, you will indeed. The young lady will be here in a minute and you’ll be too ill to see her, through running down hill to meet misfortune. Ships sail past, a score a day, and come home, too, most times, and overfill the public houses, more shame to their crew.”

These words “running down hill to meet misfortune” suggested an action to the hearer by which she could lessen her fears.

“Fetch my lace shawl and gauntlet gloves, Betsey,” she commanded, with a sudden determination. “I will go down into Noelcombe and you shall accompany me. I will see the omnibus conductor; he promised me to inquire for the poor girl at the station, he undertook to look after her, otherwise I should have gone to meet her myself—as I ought to have done, as I ought to have done.”

“It would have been better, ma’am than tying up them carnation blossoms as if Providence was mistaken in making them top-heavy.”

“I wished Miss Helen to see the garden at its best,” said the poor gardener sadly.

“Young ladies don’t look very particular at flowers, ma’am. ’Tisn’t in a garden they take interest. Fine clothes, not fine flowers, are their delight; of young gentlemen, not carnations, they take notice.”

Presently the mistress and maid—the former, dispirited and drooping; the latter, erect and energetic—were to be seen hurrying down the steep, descending street into the village of Noelcombe together.

Half an hour later a carrier’s cart drew up outside the garden door of Carnation Cottage. The carrier, who had been walking beside his horse up the hill, addressed some one who was seated on a bench among a mountain of parcels and boxes beneath the arched awning.

“This yur be the place, mum, if yer plaze to get out. It’s a awkwardish concern is a carrier’s cart for a young lady to ride in, but it saved ’ee the worke howsomever; and a long worke it be from up station down to Noelcumbe.”



“Yes, indeed, and I am so much obliged to you,” answered a gracious voice, most gratefully, and Helen, emerging from the shadow of the awning, climbed down by aid of the shaft, upon the road. “Your cart is very comfortable, I am glad I missed the omnibus now ; I couldn’t have seen the country half so well from it.”

“No, mum, I sim as how yu couldn’t. ’Tain’t much to see, however. ’Twas a bit of luck my meeting of ’ee and thinking to ask ’ee if you’d have a lift.”

“So it was ; thank you very much indeed. I have brought you out of your way, too, I am afraid.”

“Lor’ bless ’ee, mum, dorn’t you spake of it. Poppet and me dorn’t count an extra moile or tu ; it’s all in the day’s job.”

But Helen would not allow him to pooh-pooh his civility ; she was most thankful to him, and with reason. His ready West-country courtesy had not only saved her a walk of deadly length and dreariness, but had restored her self-assurance. She had not been compelled to resort to the weak revenge of the foolish ; she had not cut off her nose to spite her face after all.

She had certainly been born under a lucky star.

If a misfortune seemed to threaten her, a lucky chance, intervening, averted it. She was elate with self-congratulation when a sudden memory of her moneyless and watchless condition struck her, and, slightly sobered by the recollection, she bade the carrier "good-night," and entered her aunt's domain.

The twilight had turned to dusk, and the moon, "like a rick on fire," was rising over the sea, before the elder Miss Mitford returned. Too agitated to speak, she leaned on Betsy's stiffly-crooked arm, with her eyes cast on the ground, a thousand fears overwhelmed her. The slugs, tempted forth by the falling dew, might feast undisturbed for once in their lives; she was too preoccupied to remember them. Even Betsy was perturbed; her rugged face was solemn, and she gave quite as high a jump, and gasped quite as fast and breathlessly as did her mistress when a girl's head was thrust through the open spare room window and a lively voice cried—

"Oh, here you are, at last! I am unpacking, I will come down."

And the next moment Helen herself came out of the porch door to meet them.

"My dear, my dear, how you have frightened

me! What happened? Where have you been? There, take me indoors, Helen, I am trembling sadly, I should like to rest."

"I am so dreadfully sorry, Aunt Elizabeth; but really, upon my word, it was not my own fault."

"Kiss me, my love; now that you are here, I mind nothing. Only that conductor increased my alarm. I know so little about girls; they are odd nowadays, quite changed since my youth. Betsy didn't believe it, but, then, Betsy never believes anything, you know."

Then Helen, her aunt and Betsy hanging on her words and asking many questions, gave a detailed account of the day's occurrences. She omitted all mention of Mr. Jones's name, however, and slurred over the explanations of how she lost the omnibus.

"And you came here in the carrier's cart—how extremely uncomfortable you must have been."

"It was rather jolty down the hills, Aunt Elizabeth."

Aunt Elizabeth and she were having supper. Betsy hovered about them, joining every now and then uninvited in the conversation.

"The carrier is a civil man; he admired my

wallflowers so much in the spring—a dark variety, Helen, and particularly sweet-scented ; would your father care for some seedlings, do you think ?”

“ He would love them, auntie ; so should I.”

“ I am still thinking of the carrier, Helen ; he and Mr. Jones are so very unlike. It is extraordinary that such an intelligent person as the conductor could have been so mistaken.”

Here Betsy made some remark about Ananias in an impressive aside.

“ What mistake did the conductor make, auntie ? What did he say about me ?”

“ Well, really, I can’t quite remember, my love. You see I was in the stable-yard at the Mermaid Hotel—such a confusing spot, for the horses were loose and so close to me. Though they were quiet at the time and looking hot and exhausted, poor things, it does not do to trust to appearance—I kept my eye on them.”

“ But what was the mistake ?” Helen repeated. —“ Dear Helen is so determined,” Mrs. Mitford was in the habit of saying, “ she has such force of character.”—

“ Never mind, love, never mind. It was a mistake, so I will not repeat what might be an annoyance to you. I make a point of forgetting anything

unpleasing. Those kind of people do not mean any harm, not at all ; but they are not discerning."

These remarks were not likely to arrest Helen's curiosity.

"I should like to hear what he said."

Miss Mitford was of a plastic disposition ; though she formed her own opinions and preserved them, yet she was always ready to comply with the wishes of her companions.

"He didn't say much, Helen."

From behind them came some indignant and isolated words, of which "Shameful"—"Sir Adolphus, indeed"—"grinding the poor"—"an old-clothes man"—"ought to know better"—"respected herself"—"not a word of truth"—were distinguishable.

"Why did you go to see the omnibus conductor, auntie ?"

"I had asked him to look out for you at the station, I had given him a shilling, and he had promised to see after you. When you did not arrive, we went down to the 'Mermaid,' where the omnibus stops, to inquire for you. The conductor, doubtless to screen his own carelessness, had the effrontery to tell me that you had started for Noelcombe in young Mr. Jones's dogcart with that gen-

tleman. Yes, my dear, he even said that Mr. Jones's valet told him not to wait, as his master was taking every care of you and would see you home. I questioned him, for I could not believe it. The conductor was both wrong and foolish to invent so impossible a tale to screen his fault."

While Miss Mitford was speaking Helen blushed, and her gray eyes sparkled, but with mischief, not malice. She did not execrate the inventor of the calumny, but she laughed and turned the subject.

"Don't faint, Aunt Elizabeth, but I want some more lobster ; I was never so hungry in my life."

After supper the aunt and niece settled down for that underrated feminine delight, a "long talk." Helen was good company ; she had plenty to say, and when she listened she was a good listener.

Her aunt had a hobby—our neighbors' hobbies are apt to weary us, but Helen had inherited the family flower-love, so she was sympathetic with this horticultural enthusiasm. She discussed the subject of seedlings and cuttings, of annuals and perennials, of bedding and sowing, of grafting and budding, without being palpably bored.

Betsey belonged to that unhappy race of people who were once described as those "who hate bear-



baiting not because it gave pain to the bear, but because it gave pleasure to the spectators," so she treated her mistress's delight in her garden as a weakness to be first despised and then quenched. The pleasure-crushers of the world are to be found in each flock. Never owing to, nor, perchance, realizing their unlucky tendency, they contrive to act as a drag upon their companion's happiness, blight the blossom of his innocent amusements, and play the miserable part of Killjoy in a world not overprolific of bliss at the best of times.

Helen's unfeigned interest in an admiration for every flower of the field or garden was delightful to Miss Mitford.

"I have not enjoyed an evening so much for years," she told the girl as they mounted the stairs on their way to bed; "it was very good of you to come to me at last, love, though I am afraid you will find it dull with only an old woman for your companion. You bring brightness with you, so I hope you will be content here, though the life I lead will seem monotonous and quiet, I know."

"I thought Noelcombe was raging with dissipation, auntie, ever since it had engulfed the great Sir Adolphus."

"Well, my dear, I *hear* that Newton is always

filled with guests, and I *believe* that the Jones's entertainments are continual, but they do not invite me to partake in them. However, my friends at the Priory, the Majoribanks, are bidden to the ball there next week, and have already offered to take you with their party."

"I shan't go, though," Helen said, with a mighty yawn; "those sort of impossible people don't amuse me. I suppose everybody who goes to their house goes either to laugh at them or for what they can get."

Helen's tone was not dulcet; Miss Mitford was surprised at it.

"I know very little about them, my dear. They sit near me in church—such rows of servants and such very smart young ladies; they titter a good deal, which is not seemly; but I hear that Lady Jones is extremely kind to the poor. Their mansion is very grand and much decorated; Sir Adolphus, people say, was his own architect. You can see the lights from the window of this room—over in that direction—a little further to the left—below the clump of trees, love—you are looking at the wrong spot. Good-night.

## CHAPTER V.

“O saw ye bonnie Lesley  
As she gaed o’er the border?  
She’s gane, like Alexander,  
To spread her conquest farther.” BURNS.

WITHIN the drawing-room belonging to that gorgeous mansion, toward the lights of which Miss Mitford had drawn Helen’s attention, a rollicking party of smart people were assembled. The room, large as it was, was yet well filled, for the owner thereof and his daughters were indifferent to such charms as may be found in an unadulterated home circle, and their idea of bliss was to fill their house with guests—guests of distinction if possible—but guests at any rate, and at all hazards. Their brother, when he favored them with his presence—which was fairly often, considering that his company as an eligible young man, a good shot, and a good-humored companion—was much sought—fell in with their mood. Poor little Lady Jones’s good nature overruled her good sense ; her partiality for

her daughters converted their wishes into her law, so she, with the courage of a martyr, lived in a harassing round of dissipation among people in the society of whom she felt neither ease nor comfort. The constant strain of the endeavor to appear other than she was, and the knowledge of the failure of the attempt, spoiled all the pleasure of her riches, and turned her from a homely, sensible woman into a blundering, timorous nonentity. By the constrained expression of her daughters' faces, she knew when she had made some egregious mistake, but how to rectify such errors she realized that she was either too stupid or too old to learn.

Dinner was over—an excellent dinner it had been, such as leaves those who have been happy enough to discuss it in the best of humors. If the wit was weak among the party at Newton, the laughter was strong, and there was plenty of it, and the music of laughter is pleasant to hear in a world where it does not always over-abound.

A group of men and girls were gathered round the piano, which, with an accompaniment of banjo, bones, and vigorous voices, was degrading its mellifluous tones by leading the popular strains of that curious tune "Killaloo."

Apart from the group at the piano, upon the

ledge of an open window, Helen's recent acquaintance, Mr. Albert Jones, was seated talking, with rather a listless and condescending air, to his youngest sister, Anastasia.

"Don't grumble, Bertie, come and sing," she was saying; "or, if you won't sing, go and smoke—do *something*. I saw Lady Lucy looking over here just now; it's rather uncivil of you not to talk to her. You have been so stupid all the evening; you bored her to death at dinner, I saw her yawning."

"That polished horde, formed of two mighty tribes, the Bores and Bored," he quoted, with a comprehensive glance, first at the musicians, and then round the room. "My dear An, I can't tune myself up to concert pitch in heat like this. Lady Lucy is all very well, but she is not invigorating; she is as mild as buttermilk."

His sister looked at him rather anxiously, and knitted her eyebrows.

"She is *perfectly* charming, Bertie; we are devoted to her, and so is papa. They have asked us all there on the 29th. Didn't she tell you? Hasn't she asked you?"

"She said something about polo at their place, and a golf or tennis week—I forget which. It

made me hot to think of such violent exercise, and I said so."

"You are *too* spoiled, Bertie," said Anastasia, shrugging her shoulders. "You really are. You are getting disagreeable."

At that moment the chorus of "Killaloo"—

"We larn to sing it aisy, that song the Marseillasy  
Too long, vous long, the Continent, we learnt at Killaloo."

rung out through the room.

"Pretty thing that!" growled the young man—"just like 'White Wings' or Lady Lucy. Sort of thing you never get sick of—grows on you—just suits a night like this."

He pointed through the open window to where the moon traced its pathway across the dark, heaving sea—to where the black cliffs towered, standing on guard upon either side of the cleft chasm in which twinkled the lights of the village.

Anastasia did not look at the view, but she looked keenly at her brother.

"Did Troubadour win the Norchester Stakes?" she inquired, with apparent irrelevance.

"Walk over,"—laconically.

"Then what's the matter, Bertie? When you



are crusty something quite extraordinary must have happened."

"I'm all right, my dear ; there is nothing earthly the matter with *me*. I suppose a fellow needn't make a fool of himself unless it is agreeable to him. Lady Lucy is everything that is correct, but she can't sing—

‘Her voice was soft and low  
A cooing kind of voice, you know,  
Except when she began to sing,  
And then it was a fearful thing.’”

“Lady Lucy sings beautifully,” his sister said, rather stiffly. “Good-by, Bertie. You are such dull company, I’m off.”

She had not gone more than two or three steps when he called her back.

Anastasia returned—no one ever dreamed of disputing Mr. Jones’s wishes ; but she was impatient at his demands on her time. With a half-a-dozen young men within hail, the best of brothers would seem a dull companion ; this grim, uncomplaisant brother was an unmitigated bore.

“What *do* you want?”

“Well, I wanted to hear”—he spoke slowly ; he was staring hard at his foot, as though its appearance at the end of his trousers was an interest-

ing novelty—"I wanted to hear how many people are coming to this ball, and who they are, and what sort of entertainment it's likely to be."

This was an engrossing and a sensible topic, into which Anastasia could enter.

"*Every one* is coming," she answered, confidentially. "We have been so lucky—hardly one refusal. All the right people in the house." She ran through a string of noble names glibly, and in rather a raised voice; it is curious that such names should require emphasizing. "It ought to go off well. There are plenty of men, if they will only do their duty as well in the ball-room as they are sure to do in the supper-room."

Mr. Jones was still staring at his foot, his interest in which had developed into anxiety; for he twisted it about and craned his neck to enable him to catch sight of the sole of his shoe.

"Have you asked any of the other people?" he inquired, indifferently.

"Whom do you mean?"

"Why, the—the—what-do-you-call-them?—the villagers. The parson and the doctor, and the lawyer and the old ladies, don't you know? The people one only sees in church."

Miss Anastasia said, "Good gracious, no!" and laughed.

Then Bertie, still occupied with the formation of his foot, spoke more briskly than he had hitherto done.

"It is a great mistake to make enemies," he began, as though he was delivering a lecture and was a little pressed for time; "the greatest mistake in the world, Anastasia. We ought to ask everybody; we ought to make a point of asking *everybody*. There is no end of room in this house; a dozen more people won't crowd us out, and if I'm to stand for this side of the county at the next election it won't do to risk unpopularity and that sort of thing by want of civility. People like to be asked, and it ought to be done. I feel very strongly about it myself—I always have done so. I should like to know why they shouldn't be asked, and come, too? Surely there are plenty of old ladies in Noelcombe? Poor old souls!—a ball would cheer them up a bit. You needn't laugh. I don't want them to dance—I don't mean that—but the looking on and all the rest of it. I'm not chaffing, An; I want some more invitations sent out."

Anastasia looked perplexed, and spoke coldly—

"Thanks for indulging me with your maiden

speech, Bertie—not very elegant, but emphatic. So you will support women's rights, and old women's rights in particular? Most benevolent of you!"

"I want those invitations sent out," her brother repeated.

He did not often exert himself to express a wish, but when he did so his family knew that, come what might, that wish would eventually be fulfilled.

"Then you had better speak to mother. She is always eager to gather in from the hedges and highways. No doubt she will be charmed to send every tradesman in the village a card."

This last whim of Bertie's was preposterous, and the indulgence of it likely to prove a great trial to his relations. Though that magic word *politics* (which 'surprises in himself') could be made to account for the presence of any social curiosities at the party, yet their entertainment—an uncongenial task—would devolve upon the ladies of the house.

Anastasia was annoyed, and when she was displeased she had a knack of making herself peculiarly disagreeable to her neighbors, but it was impolitic to quarrel with her brother, so she contented herself by turning down the corners of her mouth, shrugging her wide shoulders, and leaving him to occupy his window-seat alone.

He, however, did not remain where she had left him, but crossing the room, seated himself by the side of his mother, with whom he conversed for some time. Lady Jones still possessed one joy which was unquenched by the pomp of her riches—the love of her son, her handsome, charming son, who treated her with a gentle tenderness and a courteous consideration such as had strangled the dawning shadow of a suspicion that he might be ashamed of her, and those supreme, manifest, but unsuccessful efforts of hers to be *comme il faut*.

The conversation between them, of which the young man monopolized the lion's share, and to which his mother replied with "nods and becks and wreathed smiles," was of some length, and bore the following fruit.

During the ensuing afternoon, when Miss Mitford and her niece were seated in the cool, flower-scented little drawing room at Carnation Cottage, the sound of a ring at the front gate tinkled through the open window, and mingled so harmoniously with the jubilant song of the canary that Miss Elizabeth—who was dozing in an arm-chair with her cap straying, as was its wont over her left column of curls, and her plump brown hands clasped on her round knees—neither stirred nor sighed.



Helen, who was arranging some freshly-cut roses in a basket as she hummed her favorite, "A man who would woo a fair maid," in subdued notes, saw a shadow cross the lawn; so, roses in hand, she rose and twitched the offending cap into place in view of an emergency in the shape of visitors. She had resumed her song and her occupation when Julia, awed by the stateliness of a powdered footman and excited by the unwonted sight of a gentleman caller, opened the door timidly, and in hushed tones announced—

"Lady Jones and Mr. Jones!"

Then followed some embarrassing moments, during which Miss Elizabeth woke up in a bewildered condition; Lady Jones nervously and unintelligibly endeavored to explain the object of her call, stared Helen out of countenance and broke the foreleg of the dainty chair upon the edge of which she had placed herself on her entry.

Strangely enough, the usually composed Helen had momentarily lost her self-possession, but soon regaining it, she found Lady Jones another and a firmer chair, helped her out with her disclosures, and sustained the conversation until her aunt finally emerged from the land of dreams and became her placid and tranquil self.



"It is so long since I had the pleasure of seeing you, Lady Jones, that, for the first moment, I hardly knew you," she apologized. "It seemed so stupid, but unfortunately I left my spectacles on the garden seat below the magnolia, and without them I am nearly blind, I am indeed."

"My eyes fail me, too, Miss Mitford, but I'm sorry to say I don't wear spectacles, but these awkward pinch-noses which my girls prefer, though they fall from my nose as often as I place them there."

"But I notice that your—ahem—your glasses are suspended from your neck by a chain, which is so very convenient; my spectacles frequently get mislaid. It is impossible," with a gentle sigh, "to attach spectacles."

Mr. Jones, to do him justice, was behaving with tact, he looked as though he was in the habit of paying afternoon calls with his mother, and appeared quite at home on the tiny chair in the corner, where he had retreated on his arrival, and from whence, for the first few moments, he watched the scene in silence.

As soon as the elder ladies were fairly engaged in conversation, Helen turned and spoke to this unassertive guest; though she was conscious that

his eye rested more persistently upon her than was quite in accordance with good manners, she no longer appeared to resent it. If he had approved her, soiled, weary, and travel-stained, as she had appeared the previous day, it was not probable that his admiration would lessen on the second sight of the girl, who, for some inexplicable reason, had amended her manner as much as she had improved her appearance. Yesterday he had fancied her *gauche*, constrained, shy, now she was gracious, self-possessed, and smiling, and although there was something in her ceremonious civility which balked his endeavors to arrive at that easy, hail-fellow-well-met stage of intimacy, which he usually adopted with those fortunate girls to whom he took a liking, yet he was not inclined to quarrel with her demeanor; after all it was a change, and variety is refreshing.

He had come for the purpose of inviting her to the ball, and he saw no reason for concealing his purpose so he immediately approached the subject.

"My mother's brought you a card," he said, and then urged her to accept the invitation.

Her smiling indifference to the whole question was rather astonishing to one whose desire, opinion,

or remark, usually received the undivided attention of that honored lady to whom it was divulged.

"You don't care for dancing?" he hazarded.  
"Perhaps you don't go to balls?"

"I was at a ball last week," she replied, "I am very fond of dancing."

"Perhaps you have had too much of it? One gets sick of anything."

She smiled at him without answering—a provoking smile because it was ambiguous.

He thought those gray eyes of hers with which she looked straight into his, were very clear and cold, but wonderfully pretty; he thought she looked like a rose herself in her pink cotton gown and her hands filled with roses, he thought he should like to own that cloth of gold bud with which she toyed half-absently while she talked. He wished she would be less unapproachable and more responsive.

"Perhaps," he began again, still searching for a cause for her refusal, "you don't care for a ball out of your own neighborhood? Do strangers bore you?"

"On the contrary—I like change, and therefore a change of face."

"Then, why," doggedly, "won't you come to us?"

"I am so sorry," with that formal air of politeness that was artificial, he knew, and which annoyed him, "that I am unable to accept your kind invitation."

"I am most unlucky," he returned with a smile, "you will accept nothing of mine—not even a lift in my dog-cart."

It was the first time he had alluded to their prior acquaintance, and she blushed a little when he did so, though she answered with that calm *savoir faire* and self-reliance which seemed to place her at a great distance off and reversed their former position, to his disadvantage.

"Yesterday you were a stranger to me," she said, demurely.

"So is a cabman a stranger, but you drive in his cab all right."

"I pay a cabman."

"You could pay me, if you like."

"I had no money."

"I would have put it down," he said, "I would have taken out the fare in dances."

"You were very kind," with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes, "to propose driving me, but you could hardly expect me to trespass upon your goodness by accepting your offer."

"It was no case of trespassing," he returned, answering the twinkle with a laugh, "the cart was there and the empty seat ready for you. Upon my word, I was miserable the whole evening at the thought of your walking home ; I couldn't forget it, but it was your own fault."

A very steady and expressive glance from his companion disconcerted the speaker.

"If it wasn't your own fault I don't know who was to blame," he added, with some defiance. "When I was half way home I nearly turned back to try my luck again with you, but remembering your face as I had last seen it I thought it wiser not to try."

"Had you come you would have been too late to find me for I soon met with a—a carriage in which I drove home."

"Not really ? You don't mean it, I thought all the cabs and carts were well on their way back before you left the station."

"You had forgotten the carrier's cart."

He laughed, they were sailing unpleasantly near the wind, he must change the subject.

"So you came in the guise of a parcel, what a fortunate carrier ! I am glad you were spared the walk, though I am inclined to think you deserved to

suffer for refusing my escort," then, with a sudden happy thought, "You pass through pretty country on the way here, don't you?"

"Exceedingly," with a disappointing lack of enthusiasm.

"You do not know the Rivers Meet Vale near here?"

"No, but I have heard of it."

"You must see it."

"Yes, I should like to go there."

"It's a perfect bit of scenery. It beats anything I ever saw in any country, and I have done a tiresome bit of knocking about in my life. The rivers come in contact in a narrow valley between a brace of granite tors; there is such a tumult over the meeting of the waters that you can hear the splashing and the roar half a mile off. Boulders from the cliff have rolled down into the bed of the river and the water lashes them all day long and sends up clouds of spray which keep the air cool even on the hottest summer morning. The *Osmunda Regalis* grows eight feet high on the banks; inland you can get a view over the moor, and seaward you can see right away beyond Morte Point."

"How beautiful."

"Indeed, it is beautiful!"



Scenery was a stimulating and stirring topic; Mr. Jones felt that hitherto he had not fully appreciated the beauties of North Devon.

"The morning after the ball we are going to drive up there for a blow," he continued. "We are all going, a largish party, we shall take lunch and make a day of it. It's rather a difficult place to get at, the roads are execrable. You will come with us, won't you? You would love the Vale and my mother would be so pleased to have you."

Helen's eyes had sunk to the roses on her knee, she hesitated and he eagerly pressed his advantage.

"I will get the carrier's cart if that is the only conveyance you fancy, and if I mayn't drive you, at least I may walk by the horse's head and crack the whip occasionally."

"May I leave it open?"

"No," he said, boldly, "that is just what you may not do. I hate uncertainty worse than misfortune. If you will come it will be very kind of you; if you won't I will make up my mind to bear the disappointment."

"It must depend upon my aunt," with an accession of dignity that the young man did not seem to remark.

"I thought it depended on you," he said, frank-

ly, "if it depends on her it is easily arranged," and, forthwith, he arose from his chair, quitted his non-plussed companion, and, turning his shoulder upon her, addressed Miss Elizabeth. He had hardly finished his petition for permission for Helen to join their Rivers Meet picnic before it was gratefully accorded.

"Whose picnic is it, Albert," asked Lady Jones, rising as she spoke preparatory to taking leave. "I had'n't heard a word of it. Dear me, I fancy you must have made a mistake for I do not think we are invited."

"It's all right, mother," he replied, calmly. "The girls are going and all the people in the house. It is our own picnic, but it's rather premature to talk of it, for the weather's so uncommonly unsettled down here in the West."

When the visitors had gone, the elder Miss Mitford waxed eloquent over their charms and flooded her discourse with their praises.

"Such genial and friendly people, love, the young man so handsome and so easy. If poor Lady Jones is not quite what we are accustomed to in polish, yet her deficiencies are concealed by good nature. People are sadly unkind about them. Jealousy, love, is at the root of all unkindness,

Between ourselves, Helen, I think that nice young man has taken a fancy to you. You have no idea how he stared when you were bidding his Mama good-by—it was almost uncivil—but then he has such handsome eyes.”

“He is very self-satisfied and conceited,” said the younger lady with cold deliberation.

“Dear, dear, you astonish me, Helen. From your manner and general air I quite thought, well, well, I really couldn’t tell you what I did think—old maids are fanciful.”

“I wonder if they are as fanciful as young ones,” thought the girl dipping her sweet face down in the basket of roses before her and smiling rather grimly.

## CHAPTER VI.

“Unfold, ye tender blooms of life ;  
Sing birds ; let all the world be gay ;  
‘Tis well—the morning of our day  
Must rise ‘mid joyous songs and strife.”

LEWIS MORRIS.

THE first week of Helen’s visit had passed, and she had already decided that Carnation Cottage was the pleasantest house possible in which to live, that no companion could be more congenial than Miss Elizabeth, that Betsey’s wit was equal to Sheridan’s, that Devon was the loveliest county in England—in fact, to be brief, that she was as happy as the lovely July days were long.

Her radiant face was seldom clouded ; it would take a heavy weight of grief to depress her buoyant spirits, or quench the sparkle of keen life in her eyes. In her sheltered existence such anxieties as she had of necessity encountered did not strike below the surface ; of suffering she knew nothing but the name.

Both Miss Elizabeth and the less impressionable

Betsey had gone down before her charms like ninepins. When she was out of the room, they talked about her; when she was present, they followed her about, watching her with indulgent eyes. As a matter of course, she took the guidance of the household into her firm hands, and even gave advice on the subject of gardening, flitting to and fro the grass-plot, from flower-bed to flower-bed, carrying shears or watering-pot, trowel or rake, hose or spud, as the fancy seized her, with Miss Elizabeth, a little breathless and anxious, but uncomplaining, following at her heels. When, as was sometimes the case, she fell into a wild and whimsical mood and talked and romped more like an irresponsible madcap than the dignified young woman she sometimes appeared, Miss Elizabeth, instead of scolding, went into fits of weak laughter.

When the fierce heat of the day had passed, Helen usually went down alone to the seashore, for her aunt could seldom be persuaded to leave the precincts of her own domain, explored the village, climbed the rocks, played with the children on the beach, and formed a friendship with that inevitable seaside institution, the tanned, amphibious, and most garrulous bathing-woman.

Helen was gregarious; she was content to be

alone because it was her nature to be content under all circumstances, but she dearly liked a companion, and when nobody came her way she was disappointed. The nurses and children with whom the narrow belt of sands immediately below the village was sprinkled, soon learned to know the tall, handsome girl who had a greeting for every one she met, a smile for the babies, a ready and skillful hand wherewith to build castles, fill buckets, sail boats, or pick up the fallen, and cheerful words to console the woeful. She never sat beneath an umbrella absorbed in the dead contents of a yellow-back, and therefore blind to the real game of life played forever before her eyes. She was keenly interested in her kind.

More than once during her wanderings, she had caught a glimpse of a high, yellow dogcart, with a square-shouldered figure sitting bolt upright on the box seat, whom she recognized. Usually he had some one beside him; twice it had been another square-shouldered, broad figure like his own; but the third time his companion had been a lady, a pretty girl, whose face was turned toward him as though she was listening while he talked. Once, only once, Helen had met that dogcart face to face, and then its occupant, who had been alone, had drawn



up beside her and engaged her for an unconscionably long time in conversation. More than once she had tried to move on, but each time he had recalled her by a question and always on the subject of her loss, on which topic he had, of course, a right to question her. In an affair of dogged determination Helen had met her master—an amiable, gentle, but unflinchingly obstinate master.

Mr. Jones had also called one afternoon at Carnation Cottage, and again it was for the purpose of conversing with Helen about her stolen property, of which, it seemed, he had heard some hopeful news; in fact, he believed the watch had been discovered in a pawnbroker's shop in Birmingham and in that case before very long he should have the pleasure of restoring it to its owner.

Miss Elizabeth was grateful for all the trouble that this kind young man had taken, and, although her niece was out, she had pressed him to stay to tea. He had remained, and, tea having been taken out into the garden, he had seated himself beside his hostess in the shade of the tulip tree, where he had sojourned for a very, very long time. He had shown such wisdom about, such appreciation of, and such love for his companion's flowers that on his departure she waxed enthusiastic, pronouncing him

to be "the most agreeable person of her acquaintance," and "more like the young men of my own day, love."

Helen, who had been down on the beach during this event, was toiling slowly up the hill on her way home when Mr. Jones emerged from the garden gate, with the most cherished of her aunt's rosebuds in his button-hole, and an aggressively debonair and satisfied demeanor. She was overjoyed at the prospect of recovering her watch and listened to all he had to say, which was not a little, on that and on other subjects, with eager eyes and her most gracious manner. When, at last, she left him, he watched her out of sight, and then, turning away, he walked home with a graver look than usual on his careless, untroubled face; while she, entering the garden, met her excited aunt with a torrent of insane jokes and teasing laughter. She would be in earnest about nothing; she would not listen to a repetition of Mr. Jones's conversation, she would not be interested in anything concerning him; she would only consent to hear his praise under protest. All through that evening she was in outrageously high spirits, and at last, when her poor aunt, half exhausted with laughter, led her to the piano and almost with tears petitioned for a song, she would

only sing her old favorite, "A man who would woo a fair maid," and that with such whimsical emphasis and vehemence that it set poor Miss Elizabeth laughing again.

"Sing something soft, love, something soft," the lady begged plaintively.

"Of soft heads or soft hearts, auntie? They are both equally interesting, and they hunt in couples."

"Hush, Helen, hush; do not be so wild. Sing a pretty, gentle, tender love song."

"I couldn't do it, auntie. Love is such a fraud; it really *is*—You may talk of a tender beefsteak; but a tender song—pshaw!"

"Helen, that is not right; it is unseemly, love. I am going to bed."

And she went—it was her usual and effective way of ending an argument.

Upon the afternoon of that day which had been fixed for the ball at Newton Hall the Miss Mitfords, at Helen's request, had tea early; after which the girl, adjusting her big white hat, and, as a tribute to custom, fetching her gloves (which she put in her pocket instead of upon her hands), set off for her daily walk. She paused a moment at the gate to wave a farewell to her aunt, who was bent double

over her carnation bed, the surface soil of which she was loosening with a fork,

"The tide is out this evening, auntie; I am going to the rocks. The distant rocks, it's a long walk. I may be late."

"Don't get drowned, love."

"No, auntie."

"Don't get your feet wet."

"No, auntie."

Half an hour later Helen had reached the shore. She loved the sea, the thousand lights and shades that tinged its surface, the restlessness, the eternal variety, the mystery of its troubled life. But that evening she had no time to watch the waves; she walked quickly along the sands, skirting the groups of nursemaids and children, with her face turned westward toward the cliffs, which shelved down into a jutting peninsula. Here the low rocks reached far out into the sea, and then sinking below the surface showed, like a black shadow, through the blue waters. Thither she steered her way.

The bathing-woman, who was standing as sentinel behind a long row of curious, sand-ingrained, faded garments which, secured by stones, lay supine on the yellow sands, addressed her as she passed—

"Where be 'ee going to Miss?"

“To the rocks.”

“Then plaze to mind the tide ; her comes in powerful fast and strong out yonder. Don’t ’ee go out tu far, Miss. It’s safe enough if yu’ll be a bit careful.”

Helen nodded. “She would be careful,” she said, and strode on fast.

She toiled laboriously over the rough and broken shingle which intervened between the sands and those splendid rocks—her destination. Most girls would have been daunted by the obstacles of that long and painful walk, and would soon have turned back to join those comrades who were content with pleasures less difficult of access, but with Helen it was altogether otherwise. An impediment in her route was merely a thing to be surmounted ; it was no barrier to stop her progress. When once that formidable possession of hers, her mind, was made up, her purpose, she had accustomed herself to consider, was inflexible.

She found the distance she had to traverse was far greater than she had anticipated, and it was long before she—tired, hot, and footsore—reached the desired spot and sat down on the first low rock at hand to rest and look about her. The air was redolent of the breath of the sea ; a bright breeze

was blowing, which put a "sharp head" on the chopping waves, and cut them up into bustling, zig-zag ridges that splashed and broke continually against the rocks, and tossed and swayed the heavy layers of seaweed to and fro.

Save for Helen the place was deserted ; the sea would chafe and fret so foolishly it seemed to her, so sadly, too, as though memory would not let it rest, though the sky was cloudless. Helen leaned back against the rock and watched the water, more thoughtful than was her wont. It was very cool in the shade of the cliff ; the sea-gulls swooped lazily about the bay, and a fleet of fishing-smacks, their tawny sails bright in the sunshine, were sailing past before the wind.

Presently she emerged from the shadow and began to cross the rocks, steering her course toward their furthest ledge, which formed a natural break-water on the west of the reef. She was light and agile of limb, possessed a fairly steady head and a ready eye, but the path she trod was a perilous one, for the seaweed which grew on the rocks concealed the pools, and was, moreover, both slimy and slippery.

To avoid the catastrophe of spoiling her boots and stockings, she took them off and put them upon



an adjacent rock. Then, with an easy mind and happy as a child, she waded through the tepid pools in which the green-ribbon and pink tree-seaweed floated, where vividly-green rock fish darted to and fro, and sea-anemones unfolded their tinted limbs until they bloomed like the blossoms of a chrysanthemum in the sunshine. Her observant eyes missed none of the beauties at her feet, but every now and then she remembered the dangers of the tide and kept an outlook on the sea.

She was enjoying herself after a childish fashion, the warm transparent water was tempting. She rolled her sleeves up high, and kneeling down before a pool she plunged her hand and arm deep down among the seaweed and the stones. She was laughing at the awkward flight of a tiny crab when a call—a clear, loud call—startled her to her feet.

She stood up, raised her dripping, white hand to shade her eyes, and stared in the direction whence the sound had come. A little sailing-boat, in which were seated Mr. Jones and the gentleman whom Helen had seen before in the yellow-wheeled dog-cart, was within twenty yards of her. It was the former of these two young men who had so uncere- moniously hailed her.

“Hey, hey! You musn’t stay there—don’t

stay there!" he cried. "The tide has turned; in two minutes those gulleys behind you will be three feet deep. If you don't want a ducking, you had better hurry up, I can tell you."

Helen was dismayed; the situation was exasperating. She did not move; she stooped a little, to be sure that those dreadful feet of hers were concealed, and then she cast a hurried glance around. Where was that rock upon which she had stored her belongings? Alas, she had not marked the place, and now she could not find it.

"I say, don't wait!" cried the voice again. "You will be drowned. There isn't too much time to get across."

"Thank you—thank you," she called back, feebly. "I will go—I am going."

Still she did not move.

"What a good-looking girl!" said Mr. Jones's friend. "No wonder you rowed here ten thousand miles an hour when you saw her! She's a precious deal too pretty to drown. She has lost her head, though. Why don't she go on?"

"No fear of her losing her head," returned the other, with an unkind laugh. "We have told her what to expect, so if she wishes to be drowned she knows how to do it. She is as headstrong as 'an

allegory.' If her manners matched her face she would do, but they don't."

"Poor thing! What has she done to you Bertie? She has never jumped on you, has she. You are such a lucky chap. you expect to get all the roses and none of the thorns. She 'don't take no 'count of us,' as you say in Devon, for she has not budged an inch."

"She is a little fool," said Mr. Jones, shortly. "Turn the boat, Mason. We will bustle up and leave her."

After a mild protest his friend obeyed.

Tacking to the wind, the boat sailed down the bay, and landed its occupants on the shore below Noelcombe. Here the men separated, one disappearing in the direction of Newton, the other—after wandering rather aimlessly about the sands for a time—suddenly turned his face westward, and began to plod ever the rough route which led to the reef of rocks.

Though Miss Helen Mitford was ungrateful and pig-headed, and though Mr. Jones thought it probable that he should shortly ask the gentle and pliable Lady Lucy Freemantle to marry him, yet he was interested to know what had become of that slender figure which he could still see, with his

mind's eye, standing in the sunshine, with her beautiful wet hand and arm raised and her earnest, startled eyes fixed on him. He had felt unreasonable anger at his companion's admiration of the girl, anger which he had directed upon her luckless head. He had spoken of her with unjustifiable rudeness; it was well for him that she had been out of earshot when he had done so; he could picture her face had she, by an unhappy chance, overheard his words.

If she had not flown at the first hint of danger, then she deserved praise for her pluck—not the condemnation for rashness which he had allotted her.

His head was overflowing with thoughts of her. His heart misgave him that he had not appreciated the daring bravery with which she had heard of her danger (a danger he had somewhat exaggerated), and steadily, calmy, courageously faced it.

Meanwhile, this calm young heroine, as soon as the boat's head was turned away, cast custom and caution to the winds. The choice between dignity or drowning was not hard to make, between clothed feet or safety, seemliness or preservation, boots or death. Stumbling, clambering, slipping, she ran like a stag over the rocks, fording pools and gullies

recklessly in her panic, cutting and bruising her feet and accomplishing her painful retreat with wonderful celerity considering the difficulties of her path and her constant backward glances at the departing boat.

And so, presently, Mr. Jones saw the figure for which he was in search approaching him, but most leisurely. How provokingly she dawdled; no house-laden snail ever crawled so slowly as she now advanced. Could it be that she recognized him, and from perversity, or coyness, or some unfathomable feminine coquetry, lingered for the mere purpose of annoying him?

Confound her, she was over-doing it, for she actually seated herself on the shingle within a few yards of the breaking waves, and stared out to sea as though she was as stationary (or more so) than the lighthouse. The dinner hour was approaching awkwardly near, but Mr. Jones did not retreat; on the contrary, he quickened his pace, and with a smile in his eyes and a tightly-closed mouth walked on. As he came nearer to the girl she started perceptibly; if she was not a good, nay, more, a practiced actress, that was assuredly the first time she had seen him. He saw her flush, a scarlet, deep flush, which dyed her face and neck, her lips quiv-

ered, her eyes sank to the ground, and then, with a bashful, uncertain, hurried movement, she rose to her feet.

The conclusion he naturally deduced from this delightfully unexpected shyness of hers set his heart beating fast, he had taken her unawares, and thus learned the value of that indifferent manner which it had pleased her to adopt toward him. How exceedingly pretty she looked! Her downcast, black-lashed eyes, her drooping head, that changing color of which he was the author, became her royally; he would not spoil the picture by speaking and setting her at her ease. Even her voice, as she addressed him hurriedly by name, faltered—there was a deprecating cadence, new as it was sweet, in its tones. His late companion had accused him of desiring to possess, nay, more, of actually possessing “all the roses and none of the thorns”; this blushing rose had assuredly stripped off her prickles, and she was a rare blossom, the fairest of her sisters. His heart warmed to her, he would be most gentle, he would be unconscious of her constraint. But he must be cautious, it would not do to be too—there his resolutions failed him, for Miss Mitford, with a second rapid uncertain movement, sank down again into



her former position on the shingle, flushing like Aurora.

It was his duty, of course, to follow her lead and seat himself beside her, and, late though it was, he felt no disinclination to do so. Leisurely, and with a kind smile, he placed himself beside her; his reception had flattered him, he was sure of himself.

*“Trust in thyself—then spur amain,”* for wooing as for working, is an excellent motto.

To give him his due, he made himself very agreeable; how fluently he talked and how quietly she listened; she answered him but in soft monosyllables; he felt that he shone in conversation, she was evidently well satisfied with his society, for she made no attempt to move, she sat motionless as a statue. Fired by the troubled expression of her beautiful eyes—by the way, how her sweet face had grown in expression, the anxiety that ruffled her brow, the restlessness, a constraint betrayed by the way in which she toyed continually with some pebbles in her hand, were all new—he began to talk sentiment, it was not his way to be sentimental, he hardly knew what ailed him. Following her gaze across the sea, he began to descant on its beauties. Had she watched last night’s sunset,

the lights had been—what did that poet say? he was sure Miss Mitford knew whom he meant and what he meant—“day died like the dolphin.” Yes, that was it. Had she seen a storm at sea? Viewed from the coast he declared it to be a most glorious sight; he would give anything to be with her at Noelcombe when a real nor’easter was blowing, and the waves dashed roaring up against the rocks and drenched the cliffs a hundred feet aloft with spray. But she would be miserable, her kind heart would be with the sailors, and her thought of them would blind her eyes to the beauties of the storm. He was getting on fast, he was going ahead; to his comrade’s unutterable relief, he suddenly drew out his watch and changed the subject.

“It is half-past seven,” he announced carelessly; he thought that, perhaps, her watchless position had made her regardless of time. “At what a pace the time has gone.”

Every nerve in her body lustily negatived that remark, but she said—

“Yes, it is very, very late. Won’t you” (timidly) “be late for dinner?”

“Yes,” he returned, with a regretful sigh; “unless we start at once, I shall probably get no dinner at all.”

“Don’t” she began, with a sudden boldness ; “please don’t think it necessary to wait for me. I shall not go home for some time.—I don’t know *when* I shall go home ;—not for hours and hours.”

“Then,” he returned, gravely, “you mean to deprive me altogether of my dinner.”

“But, surely, you have forgotten, you *must* go ; it is the night of your ball.”

He murmured something which the breaking of the waves drowned, but which was in reality a rash avowal of oblivion to the mundane matters of life under the present circumstances.

She smiled a bewilderingly kind smile into his face.

“Good-by,” she said, holding out her hand to him. “I won’t allow you to stay for another moment. I should never forgive myself if you lost your dinner through your—your politeness, and don’t you think—I’m sure—at least I think your people will want you and won’t know where you are.”

A pathetic, pleading note had become entangled in her hesitating tones. He took her cold little hand and held it tightly, answering her with some words apt and soft enough to repay her amply for

her favor. He fancied that he knew a good deal about the ways of women, but this one puzzled him. Game so easy of acquisition was sport not worthy of the name. But the hand which he held, small and cold though it was, struggled stoutly for freedom, so stoutly, indeed, that he released it.

Poor Helen ; the failure, or rather the result of her final effort to rid herself of this unconscious aggressor overwhelmed her. She was disheartened, perplexed, and tired out. The incoming waves splashed dangerously near her ; a few minutes more and her present position would be untenable. Her mouth quivered perceptibly, and the tears started to her eyes. Mr. Jones noticed these preliminaries with dismay ; he had barely time to feel that matters were getting serious, and to reflect that the kissing away of these tears would be a blessed work, when her drowned gray eyes were turned tragically to his.

“ Won’t you go ? Will *nothing* make you go ? ” she cried, pushing forth, for one moment, from beneath her serge skirt, a bare and bleeding foot at which she pointed with a pregnant gesture. “ I have to walk all the way over these dreadful, dreadful stones barefoot. I could not find my—my boots or stockings when you frightened me ; they were

out there on the rocks ; they have been washed away. Oh ! you are laughing — how *can* you laugh ?”

And the tears in her eyes welled over, and rolled slowly down her cheeks.

## CHAPTER VII.

“There’s a divinity that shapes our ends,  
Rough-hew them how we will.”

SHAKESPEARE.

BUT if Mr. Jones had smiled, the smile arose from a desire to screen an inevitable chagrin, rather than from any sense of humor at the situation, and at her words he became grave as a judge. Indeed, he felt as little inclined to laugh as did Helen herself at that moment, for he was disagreeably conscious of having played the coxcomb in his thoughts. Had ever man more grievously misread a manner? And yet he was glad—yes, glad that he had been mistaken, and that this young person differed from that vast tribe of *demoiselles a marier*, who advanced uninvited from all corners, and at all stages of his life, to meet him.

At the sight of her distress, he forgot himself; such a lapse of memory was not quite of so rare an occurrence with Mr. Jones as with the majority of



his sex. Divesting himself instantly of that gallant air which embarrassed her, with considerable tact and kindness he soothed Helen into taking a less hopeless view of her position ; and when her tears were dried and she was composed, she found that he had again opened a road through which she could escape from a dilemma.

“But I am giving you so much trouble · you are so kind,” she faltered.

“Trouble ? Nonsense, it’s no trouble at all. I was going into the village, anyway. I shall get up to your place in no time, and explain what has happened. You stay quietly here ; no, not just here, but a dozen yards further in. Get up ; give me your hands ; lean on me, that’s right. Bah ; how those beastly stones hurt you. There, you’re all safe now, and the tide won’t be in for an hour. Don’t move, and I will undertake that your maid shall bring your shoes and stockings before you know where you are. No, don’t thank me, it’s absurd. You know it was all my fault for scaring you out of your life on the rocks. Good-by, till to-morrow. I wish ”—pressing the hand he held suddenly and firmly—“I wish to heaven that you were coming to our dance to-night.”

But before he had reached Noelcombe, when his

young blood had had time to cool, and when the extraordinary influence of the girl's presence was removed, he was no longer sure of the truth of that forcibly expressed desire, for he remembered Lady Lucy to whom he had already engaged himself for half a dozen dances, and to whom he quite intended to engage himself for life.

Some time later that evening, Miss Elizabeth Mitford, her spectacles upon her nose, was delicately perambulating her dewy lawn, with her upgathered skirts in one hand and a jam-pot containing a deadly solution of salt and water in the other. The passion of her nationality, the thirst for sport, shone in her eager, downcast eyes.

While she was thus engaged, her niece came out from beneath the embowered porch and stood silently looking across the bay. Helen was tired, her eyes were languid, her expression was soft and subdued, her vigorous spirits were no longer aggressive, and contrary to her usual habit, she preserved a lengthy silence. The flower-scented air was warm, the sinking sun, like a ball of fire, lay in the "dappled sky," the clouds, crimson, purple and gold, cast broad shadows upon the indigo background of the sea and were reflected in fainter tints upon the gaunt cliffs. Standing against a back-

ground of myrtle and rose trees, she watched the wondrous picture of the sea and of the sunset, and was still. Thoughtful, perforce, and against her will, for thought is pain and pain is not to be tolerated in so blithe a world. Helen was not given to meditation, she was emphatically a woman of speech, not of deliberation. Neither had it been her habit to indulge in day-dreaming—she wanted no more than she owned, she preferred fact to fancy, therefore the building of an air-castle was a distinct waste of time which might have been better employed in enjoying life in the solid cottage wherein her lot was cast.

The result of her present reflection was a smile, not a sigh.

“Auntie, let those wretched slugs live on for just one more night,” she said; her suggestions were apt to fall from her autocratic lips in the guise of commands. “Come over here, and look at the sea and let me talk to you. When you are slug-hunting, you never hear a word I say.”

Thus adjured, the disturbed sportswoman drew herself upright by a stiff effort, and with a guilty confusion turned to her niece.

“My love, I did not see you, I thought you were in the drawing-room singing that odd song of yours

or I should not have come out here. How," anxiously, "are your poor, dear feet?"

Helen looked down critically at those invalids, which were roaming within her aunt's capacious house boots—cloth boots, they were capped with patent leather, lined with scarlet flannel, side laced, devoid of heels and roomy.

"Oh, they are all right now, Auntie, they don't hurt at all, I had forgotten them. I assure you, it is awful when they press their identity on one—as mine did upon me on the beach."

"Mr. Jones is a most kind-hearted person, Helen."

The girl had turned aside to pick a crimson rose from the tree behind her, which she placed in the bosom of her gown : she was humming very softly

"It may draw you a tear  
Or a box on the ear,  
You can never be sure till you've tried."

"I learned both the value of boots and of messengers," she answered, watching the sky.

Though Miss Elizabeth had obediently joined Helen, her eyes were not on that miraculous and glorious panorama of changing color to which they had been directed, but had crept down to the hunting ground at her feet.

"Auntie," in a slow, low-pitched tone, "were you ever in love?"

Miss Elizabeth, scrutinizing the lawn, said, with a pre-occupied air.

"What did you say, my dear?"

"Were you ever in love?"

"Oh, yes, my dear, to be sure I was."

"Then you *fell in love*?"

"Yes, yes, certainly I did."

"Well?" inquisitively."

No answer.

"Well, Auntie?" a little louder, and persuasively.

"Well—what—my dear?"

"What happened when you were in love?"

"Nothing which I can at this moment recollect, Helen."

"Then you were not engaged?"

"Yes, indeed, I was engaged for nearly a year, love. It was an anxious time and Thomas jilted me."

Helen drew in her breath and flushed. Her curiosity had inflicted a wound on this poor lady, who must yet be made of tough material for she had been *jilted*, JILTED, JILTED, and yet her outraged pride had not *killed* her! Helen, in her

angry distress, could not speak, but the victim of the wrong manifesting no agitation, she went on commenting on the circumstance with serene complaisance.

“Dear me, Helen, you have no notion how unpleasant it all seemed, and how foolishly I fretted. It is hard to foresee in a present distress a future gain. Providence was very good to me. The poor thing for whom he jilted me became his wife—a position I was ignorant enough to envy her. She has had a hard life, for he made a most uncomfortable and selfish husband, while I, my dear, have spent the autumn of my happy life without a care. My love, the adoption of a life-partner is too great a risk to be willingly undertaken by any one except those who are fearless through the inexperience of their extreme youth. . .—My goodness me! Helen, there, look, upon the stalk of that tender picotee! Do you see it? Rapacious little wretch! I must secure him.” And she ran back to recommence her engrossing occupation. Then Helen re-entered the little porch and a few minutes later the sound of music reached Miss Elizabeth through the open window. Helen was singing a new song, unfamiliar to the household.

Upon the following afternoon the younger Miss



Mitford, looking as sweet and fresh and fair as the flowers around her, was fidgeting about the grass-plot as she waited for the carriage which Lady Jones had promised should call at four o'clock to pick her up on its way to Rivers Meet. She wore, with sad extravagance, her very best gown, a thin electric cotton that matched the color of her eyes, and clad in which she looked her best, and knew it. In her waistbelt she had carefully stowed a whole *parterre* of her aunt's choicest carnations; her nut-brown lovelocks were arranged to perfection beneath the broad brim of her hat.

"Too-to-to-too-toot!" the stirring and lively call of a horn, the rumble of wheels, the sharp trot of horses' hoofs, the jingling of harness precursed the arrival of the Jones' coach, which presently, loaded with a boisterous, laughing, happy crew, drew up alongside the door of Carnation Cottage.

Neither Lady Jones nor her son were among the party, but a girl, whom Helen afterward learned to be Patricia Jones, called out, listlessly—

"How do you do?" following the question by the advice to "Get up as fast as possible, for the horses won't stand."

So Helen mounted the steps precipitately and squeezed herself into the small space on the third

seat back whither she was directed—a little abashed at finding herself the one outsider among a party of intimates—a position seldom enviable. Her happy faculty of easy enjoyment served her in good stead during that drive, for, more from lack of invitation than want of inclination, she took small part in that “feast of reason and flow of soul” floating around her. She was in the habit of taking her stand in the foreground of the scene; here she was unceremoniously thrust into the background, and subsequently ignored—no doubt a wholesome though an unpalatable experience for the damsel, who, however, laughed at such witticisms as she heard, observed the company, and craned her neck first on one side, then on the other, to catch a full sight of the surrounding country, and culled plenty of pleasure from so doing. Patricia, Anastasia, and the other half-dozen girls were fully occupied with their respective swains, and the aftermath of the previous night’s flirtations was being cropped on all sides.

The young man whom Helen had seen with Mr. Jones in the boat was driving, and by his side on the box-seat Anastasia sat; such attention as he could spare from the team, which required careful handling over the Devon roads, she engrossed.

Once, and once only, Patricia addressed her silent guest—

“I’m afraid you have not much room, Miss Mitford. My brother said you would go in the landau with my mother, and she forgot all about you and started an hour ago.” Then, turning to the man next her, she went on—“Bertie drove Lady Lucy in the dogcart ; she was more than half afraid, but he insisted.”

“Have they settled it?” he asked, with that sort of smile which flickers only over one “it.”

Miss Jones shrugged her high, broad shoulders.

“Bertie is like all the rest of you, Sir Edwin,” she returned—“doesn’t know his own mind. The fact is he is an unconscionable flirt, though if one told him so he wouldn’t believe it.”

The gentleman addressed murmured some response, at which Patricia’s rosy cheeks grew rosier, and to which she retorted with gratified smiles.

Helen was an unsympathetic observer of these soft passages ; her lips hardened a little. “They are all making fools of themselves—every one,” she thought, and she plumed herself on her superiority to these weaknesses.

Up and down the heaving country the strong team of hill-trained horses trotted fast. The air

fanned a color into Helen's cheeks, and brightened her eyes. The chaperon of the party was a girl, little older than Helen herself, whose husband was Helen's neighbor, and who, before they reached their destination, fell into a broken conversation with her. When they alighted at Rivers Meet he elected to constitute himself her companion, and though he was heavy, dull, and universally discontented, she was compelled to accept his proffered society, as it seemed to be a choice between him as her squire or no one. Thus she spent the greater part of the time with him, trying conscientiously to amuse and interest him, but failing obviously. She received a careless smile and a pre-occupied greeting from her young host. He did not speak to her ; his presence was in great demand. A girl with a weak, inanimate face, whom Helen heard addressed as Lady Lucy, was always by his side, and he seemed to bestow some of that superfluous energy of his upon the arrangement of the picnic, for the servants were flying to and fro at his behests.

Now this wise young man had read "the books of woman's looks" rather deeply : he knew the feminine weakness that desires everything except that one thing which she possesses, that values nothing which she owns, but ever casts a covetous eye

upon the unattainable, and so, though with considerable reluctance, he scrupulously neglected Helen. The picnic part of the entertainment was worthy of its source—iced drinks with startling names ; sandwiches cool, curious, and unwholesome ; tea, coffee, sugared and almonded cakes, bon-bons, and tea-table accessories beloved of women were pressed upon the guests by troops of servants. No man need stir a finger on his comrade's behalf, and therefore the men, for once in a way, enjoyed a picnic.

After tea Helen and her squire were wandering lazily along the side of the brawling river, the noise of which was an excuse for maintaining silence—so she diplomatically suggested, for she found herself at the utmost tether of easy discourse—while each was secretly wondering how soon the call of the horn would summon them for their return journey. The gentleman was grateful to Helen, first for her face, which he admired, secondly for having saved him any trouble in conversation ; but for all that he was thinking, not of her, but of his dinner, while she was conscious of being tired, disappointed, and puzzled.

Why had Mr. Jones been so anxious that she should go to Rivers Meet ? Though his was the only familiar face among all these strangers, he had



never once come near her. He was not the least desirous of her company, he was unconscious of her presence, which he had certainly been at some pains to secure. She had thought about him a good deal, she had never thought of any stranger so much before. She was thinking about him at the very moment when he emerged from behind the granite, moss-fringed boulder before her and joined them. This time he was alone, no insipid pale-eyed girl to monopolize him. Helen was accustomed to receiving deference, if not devotion, from men ; she almost considered it her due. Almost simultaneously with his appearance the tooting of the horn broke above the roaring of the water and echoed among the hills ; this was the sound for which she had been eagerly listening, it had come but just three minutes too soon.

“That is the muster, old chap,” said Helen’s squire with alacrity, addressing Mr. Jones. “Come along, Miss Mitford, you and I must be off. Awfully noisy place this—Niagara not in it. Shan’t be sorry to get into the quiet. See you again. Good-by. Good-by.

“Good-by, Jack,” said he, “but it isn’t good-by to Miss Mitford. If she will allow me, I am to have the pleasure of driving her back in my cart.



Lady Lucy fancies there is going to be a thunder-storm, so she has booked for the landau, and I can't be such a brute as to sunder any of the couples on the coach."

By this speech Mr. Jones had shown the subtlety of the serpent ; by his indifferent, but incontestable invitation, he precluded the possibility of Helen's either refusing his escort or guessing at what pains he had been in perfecting the present arrangement. To which arrangement she acquiesced quite graciously—her pride would not allow her to wince beneath the punishment to her vanity.

"Will you go down and see the start, Miss Mitford ? Or will you come a hundred yards higher up the stream and have a look at the pools ?"

She hesitated ; she had no inclination to see the start, she had no interest in her late companions. Mr. Jones read her silence to his liking.

"We won't see them off. Good-by's are melancholy duties, you are quite right. Come along down this path, it's not far," and he led the way through the bracken, "but such a ripping place when you get there. We have plenty of time, I am going to drive you home by the new cut round the Great Tor—it is a shorter way than the way you came, but

the road isn't safe for coaching. You want a good head and a steady nerve to appreciate the view, but you possess both, I know."

He went on talking with great ease and friendliness. It really was impossible to remember lost parental H's, plebian progenitors, overbearing sisters, or purse-proud oddities, in company with the sunny mood of this genial comrade. What gratification was to be found in holding aloof from and sulking with a person who is blind to your frigidity, who listens eagerly to your remarks, who understands and responds to your smiles, who meets your thought half way with an answering thought, and who, this last clause is the most effective in the category—should it please you to turn your back upon and leave him, would be quite as happy, content, and debonair, with some other young woman beside him. Helen did not argue either with him or with herself, but she forgot his drawbacks, though she meant to remember them—and responded to his mood. She became friendly and enjoyed herself, her face was always dangerously expressive of her feelings, he saw at once that she was pleased.

Precipitous hills inclosed a wide ravine through which a swift and angry river dashed, striking against impending boulders with a roar, gushing

in shallow cascades over the stones, rushing with silent but mighty force beneath the rocky banks. At one spot a cluster of jagged bowlders had been detached from the overhanging cliff and had fallen into the bed of the river, subduing, by their strength, the frenzy of the water, which lay in deep, dark, brooding pools between them. Further on, like a giant refreshed, and with an outburst of fury, the water in a spouting sheet poured over a lofty fall, and thundering down, sped headlong on its course to the sea.

To this locality Bertie guided his companion.

“Isn’t this ripping?” said he, leaning against the rock, upon a ledge of which she had seated herself. “I wanted you to see the pools. I knew you would like Rivers Meet. Just look and listen, I won’t talk to you. A human voice or a human being is superfluous here. We are too insignificant to assert ourselves ; we ought to take back seats and keep quiet.”

The brawling river drowned his last words, which he had addressed more to himself than to her.

She clasped her hands tightly, and did as he told her. She looked and listened, she forgot him, she forgot herself, her eyes grew dim with wonder and

with awe, her quickened breath rose and fell sharply.

Before the eternal beauty of those hills and vales, before the overwhelming majesty of God's creation, her puny "pride of life" was annihilated. She turned to him for sympathy as a child might turn.

"And I shall go away and forget it!" she sighed, and then added, slowly—

"Oh, Memory shield me from the world's poor strife,  
And give these scenes thine everlasting life."

She was astounding him by this departure: but he said again, in that familiar formula which, like one of Humpty Dumpty's words, did duty with him for a reflection—

"It's *ripping*!"

"It makes me good," she said—"makes me *want* to be good. Nothing else matters. All the things we value are nothing—they are ridiculous. I want only to be good."

He nodded. He knew, or guessed, what she meant; but he was a genuine John Bull, to whom gush is impossible. Only upon a very great emergency was a glimpse below his leveled surface to be obtained.

He kept his eyes on her glowing face in lieu of those glorious waters. She caught his glance, hesitated, blushed, and then jumped to her feet.

“We ought to go,” she said ; and as he did not dispute her assertion, she retraced her steps, he following in her wake.

## CHAPTER VIII.

“Is’t possible that on so little acquaintance you should like her? that, but seeing, you should love her? and loving, woo?”

*As You Like It.*

WOMAN—let her assert her independence never so emphatically—is naturally a dependent growth. She belongs, if not to the genus parasite, to the tribe of creepers, and without a trellis-work to which to attach her delicate, but tenacious, tendrils she falls—a straggling, useless, meaningless cumbrer of the ground, whose very blossoms are hidden or trodden under foot. The trellis work to which she clings is not inevitably love. No, the stancher, if less happy, foundation of duty, labor, self-abnegation, ambition, or philanthropy may uphold her. By any one of these she, creeping, climbs—slowly, laboriously, painfully, but still she climbs upward. Without one or other of these supports she droops, forlorn and useless.

Some one who speaks with authority has said



“that man is at his best when he stands alone”; but it is not so with women. To her a prop is a necessity—a prop self-created or bestowed, but a prop, an object, a trellis-work upon which to cling until the “fever which we call life” is past.

Helen never thought seriously of the path of life which she was treading, or whither it led. The sense of its duties and responsibilities, its possibilities and impossibilities, she shook off her mind as a duck shakes the water from its feathers. She had lived in an atmosphere of love and happiness; she had been shielded from all troubles. She had been petted, admired, sought after, and to her opinion her companions had deferred. The little god Cupid she simply despised; if any of her acquaintances had shown symptoms of desire to pay tribute to his shrine, this young Diana’s attitude grew forbidding—she would have none of it.

Mr. Flight alone had stoutly defied her wishes, and thrust his unwelcome affection obstinately before her. He had been humble, subservient, dismal, but he had been passionately in earnest. For the first time in her life, Helen had realized that this love of which she had heard and read was a serious thing, and not the mere idle dream, born of fancy, which she had hitherto considered it.

As a matter of course, but with complete authority, Mr. Jones took Helen's guidance into his hands. He helped her into the cart, wrapped a light rug over her knees, and negatived her ardent desire to drive herself decidedly.

"Lean back," he said. "That seat is pretty comfortable, and you must be tired."

"I'm not the least tired. I should like to drive."

"Are you used to driving?"

"Yes."

She was accustomed to driving the Rector's rough gray pony, which lived in the paddock, and was twenty years old.

"Then you shall take the reins presently. She's fresh at starting, and I know her ways. She will soon cool down. Do you mind my smoking?"

"Not if the wind won't blow it in my face," she candidly replied. She did not share the modern damsel's oft-asserted passion for the fragrance of tobacco.

"The wind is the other way, and I'm half a foot above you," he urged, with some natural anxiety.

"Then smoke, by all means."

He thrust his hand into his pocket.

"I haven't a light," he told her, "so I can't."

And he mounted to her side and they started.

Few mild enjoyments equal that soothing sense of drowsy well-being in which a tired frame revels as it is driven through the balmy air of a warm summer evening, with a fresh horse between the shafts that covers the ground with a long, easy, equal stride—traversing, too, such wild and wondrous scenery as beggars description.

Helen's face still wore the reflection of that softened intensity of feeling which it had caught by the river side. The long hours she had passed in the open air had lulled the aggressive vivacity of her youth; the spirit of mischief no longer sharpened her eyes, her dimples played faintly in her soft cheeks. She was gentle, therefore more womanly, and for that reason a thousand times more winning than before.

He and she were talking as though they had been friends from childhood. If that cool brother-demeanor of his was assumed for her deception, it was a clever and seductive mask.

"How did you like Jack Peel?" he was asking her. "You and he spent the day together pretty well, didn't you?"

"He sat next me on the drag. I liked him—a little ; but he hates everybody, and doesn't admire anything."

"I suppose he admires Mrs. Peel?"

"Isn't she pretty? I didn't know she was married—at least, not to him."

"You mean she flirts! Oh yes, she does."

"She is very pretty and amusing."

"She's a butterfly, but a man wants more than color, down, beauty, to live upon. That sort of thing is stunning but you want sunshine to show it off. A butterfly isn't much to admire on a wet day. A good deal of rain falls in Devon—and elsewhere."

"On a wet day one can stay indoors."

Helen had a suspicion that she was a butterfly, her high spirits were fatiguing.

"A butterfly indoors ; think of the fluttering on the window-pane."

"A butterfly can't help being a butterfly."

"No more than a chrysalis can help being a chrysalis. Both are very nice in their way, but I have no wish to own either one or the other. Don't argue with me please, I'm not up to it, but I know what I mean and I know what I like. I want a wife far better than I am myself, some one who

would keep me up to the mark, some one who would do what I told her and yet some one whom I should only tell to go her own way because I should know her way to be wise and straight. I couldn't stand any woman whom I had to look after, it would knock the love clean out of me."

All this rather overwhelmed Helen, she did not know how interesting this lady in the clouds had lately become to Mr. Jones.

"So you would like to marry an angel," she remarked, with a malicious smile, "*poor* angel!"

He laughed.

"*Poor* angel," he repeated glancing at her. "How can an angel be poor, Madam? The sense of her superiority would keep her rich, and me humble. No angel, however angelic, for me."

"You are hard to please."

"On the contrary I am always pleased but never satisfied.

"I think a man ought to be very thankful if he persuades any woman, of any sort, to be his wife," retorted Miss Mitford, yawning deliberately.

Her words and her yawn disconcerted her companion and for some minutes they drove on in silence. As a rule, the honored girls to whom he confided his sentiments concerning the future Mrs.

Jones hung upon his words as though they were oracles ; but if they were discreet, they committed themselves by no comments, looking all they did not say, for those sentiments of his had been known to change repeatedly.

How little we guess what impression we make upon others or what opinion they form of us. How differently different people estimate our character. To Helen's own intimate friends and relations she seemed a gay, mischievious, lovable girl, whose unshadowed weal accounted for her want of softness, but to Mr. Jones her gayety had been conspicuous by its absence. When he had offended her by his allusion to butterflies how could he fancy that she would fit her stately head into the cap, feeling angered and wounded by his just attack ? She had (as had he) been brought up on commendation, but this self-satisfied young man always seemed to get her at a disadvantage, she had begun to wish to please him, and she fancied she had failed, the fancy irritated her a little. She would have liked to impress him by her beauty, her dignity, her calmness, her good breeding, but he did not seem to notice her advantages. The sun had sunk beneath a mass of gloomy cloulds, which were gathering in heavy groups over the now dingy



sky and cast abroad black shadows on the hills, the air had grown heavy but was stirred by a warm, rising wind. When our travelers reached the New Cut to which Mr. Jones had alluded, and came in sight of the sea, its horizon was dim with fog, and the waves murmured listlessly and softly.

Mr. Jones had warned Helen that she would require a steady nerve and strong head if she was to enjoy the view, and he was right, for the road on which she found herself was hewed out of the hillside. It was a ledge cut on the side of a mighty cliff which towered perpendicularly overhead on the left hand and on the right descended a sheer precipice, a thousand feet, into the sea.

Down below in the bay the slumberous waves rippled lazily over sunken rocks and gently laved the hollowed crags, lulled by the caressing air, into forgetfulness of storm and wind. The sea-breeze was idly whispering as if the blast of storm and fury were unknown. The sea-wave was trifling with her cold lover the rock as if she could never again, spurred by the gusts of love and despair, break into passionate and desperate longing. Delusive calm ; for, soon surging and lashing her misery to madness, she shall shatter her glorious billows into a

thousand fragments as she beats herself to death against his impenetrable heart.

The width of the road upon which the dog-cart was traversing was broad enough to admit of two carriages driving abreast. A low wooden paling had been roughly extemporized on the extreme verge of the precipice, but this every here and there had crumbled away and disappeared, leaving no barrier, however frail, between the traverser of that giddy pass and an appalling death.

For the first few minutes of the crossing Helen tried to admire the view.

"How beautiful—" she murmured below her breath, struggling for those steady nerves with the possession of which she had been credited. "Oh, Mr. Jones," with a sudden collapse of courage, "please, be careful."

At her words he reigned in the horse.

"Don't you like it? Shall we turn back? I can turn in a moment."

*Turn!* her head reeled at the thought.

"Oh, no; go on. I like it. I'm not afraid. Only you won't drive *fast*? You will keep *close* to the side, won't you?"

"You are quite sure that you would not rather

go back? I can take you home the other way, you know."

"No, no; go on. I shall get used to it in a moment. It is only just at first—and those seagulls flying out below us make me dizzy, and the sea, wriggling, and like a wrinkled walnut, such a long, long way below."

"Don't look straight down; look right out across the bay. There are a dozen fishing-smacks sailing down, with those tawny sails set which you admire."

"Oh, lovely," she said. "How long is this—this New Cut?"

He was walking the horse very slowly, and the cart was hugging the cliff side.

"A quarter of a mile," he answered. "If we went more quickly, it would sooner be over."

"Yes, but I would rather go slowly, if you don't mind."

"When we round that corner" (pointing to a distant curve of the cliff which concealed any further sight of the road) "we soon turn inland, and get into a lane with twenty feet of solid bank on either side."

"We shall get there in ten minutes?" interrogatively.

"About that. You are giddy," anxiously. "I am so desperately sorry that I brought you. You told me the other day that you could stand any height, or I should not have thought of bringing you."

"I'm getting better ; I didn't know I should mind. It is very stupid of me. I'm so sorry."

She was fighting bravely against her fear, despising her swimming head and the sickening quivers of faintness that unstrung her muscles.

"Will you get out and walk?"

This palliation of her misery was forbidden by the thought that, to allow of her descent from the cart, the horse would have to step nearer to the edge of the cliff, in which case she knew she should scream.

She shook her head.

"Shall I tell Phil to lead the mare?"

He was much concerned, for she had grown very pale, and the smile she forced to her lips was piteously unreal.

"Yes, I should like that," her voice shook. "Thank you."

But, as Phil alighted to obey this astonishing order, a sudden sharp sound above their heads startled them. They looked up. Down the rugged face of

the cliff, hurled from crag to crag, whirling like a gigantic bird through the air, a gray, struggling mass was seen to descend until it fell, with a dull, sickening thud—such a sound as haunts memory for a lifetime—upon the road in front of the trembling mare. She stopped, backed a pace or two, plunging and rearing in terror; then, answering to the voice and hand of the master, she dashed forward. They passed that grim and shapeless mass, lying motionless and blood-streaked on the road, in safety, but the wheel of the cart grated against the wooden paling that guarded the edge of the precipice, and shivered it to splinters. Then, at a mad gallop, the mare raced on. The air hissed past them; the cart rocked like a swing; the cliffs seemed to rush out to meet them; startled seagulls whirled around them; below in the yawning deep the sea reeled.

Once Helen put out her hands and caught at the reins. With rough fury he bade her keep still, and she obeyed.

Round the perilous sweep of the cliff they tore, whirling again, so near their death that he set his teeth, thinking the end had come. One fraction of an inch to the right and nothing would save them, but again the frantic mare answered to his voice and his grip of the rein. She swerved ever so little to

the left and rushed safely by—on, on, scudding like a cloud before the wind—on, on, until sky, sea, clouds, and cliffs mingled in one staggering panorama.

Helen sat motionless. Once, when the thought of her mother beset her, she had clutched at the reins; otherwise she had not moved, nor had she spoken. Through her mind the memory of heroes who had faced death without fear came and strengthened her. Though no one should know it, she would not quail or shudder; she would not be afraid; she would die hard. She was one of those “who do not mind death, but can not bear pinching.”

But when the danger was past, when the blessed shelter of high banks rose on either side, when the mare’s gallop sank to a canter, and from a canter to a trot, when they were safe and the hideous sight of sea and cliff was left far behind, then came the demon reaction to unnerve her.

It was a deep and fervent “Thank God!” which broke from her companion, that loosened the flood-gates of her tears. Till then he had not spoken, nor had he looked at her; but when he turned and she heard those words, saw the expression in his dark eyes, which met hers, she burst out into weeping.



She clung to his arm, she buried her face against his shoulder, she trembled and wrung her hands. A long hill lay before them. The mare's trot had subsided into a quiet walk. He put his arm round her, comforting her as though she were a frightened child.

"There, there ; it's all right—you are quite safe. Don't cry. You shall never go near the place again."

She was so unstrung and beside herself that she sobbed her heart out, as if it were her father's shoulder against which she hid her eyes; she was oblivious as to whose protecting arm supported her, or whose hand patted her soothingly, as though she was a baby to be quieted by such treatment.

"What fell ?—What was it ?—It was killed."

"A sheep, poor brute ! Don't talk of it. Think of something else."

"I can't"—shuddering—"I daren't open my eyes ; I am afraid I should see it."

"I wouldn't open them just yet. You will be all right in a minute."

"I should not really have touched the reins, I only put out my hand."

"It was a case of life or death. I hadn't time to be gentle. I'm awfully sorry. I deserve to be shot."

His encircling arm held her more closely as he spoke, but during the pause which followed, Helen drew away from him, covering her face with her hands.

“Look here, don’t give up like this,” he said, rather alarmed. “You have been so plucky all the time.” The compliment was undeserved, but she did not dislike it on that account.

“I can’t help it—I can’t indeed !”

Her voice came thick and low, her hands fell down from before her deathly face ; she tried to smile, and then murmuring, “I don’t feel very well,” she fell back again upon his shoulder. She had fainted.

On the summit of the hill which they were mounting was a country inn, thither Bertie, supporting the girl, with a now aching arm, drove fast. Assisted by the host, he lifted Helen from the cart and carried her into the house. In the inn-parlor stood that horse-hair sofa, oft described because the memory of his discomforts is not easily obliterated, peculiar to wayside hostelries and seaside lodgings ; upon it Mr. Jones laid his burden. He was almost as pale as she ; he kept his head, but he was horribly frightened ; he fully believed her to be dead, and would not be reassured by the landlady, who told

him that "Her Mary Kate falled away a score o' times last summer."

They doused Helen's pretty head with water and chafed her white hands ; they fanned her with a newspaper and burned feathers and held salts under her nose. Every suggestion which the landlady made Bertie executed with feverish anxiety. But when at length he poured tea-spoonful after tea-spoonful of cooking brandy between her pale lips, it had at last the desired effect ; she coughed once or twice, turned her head on the crochet antimacassar, and slowly opened her eyes.

## CHAPTER IX.

"On life's vast ocean diversely we sail,  
Reason the card and passion is the gale."

POPE.

"There be none of beauty's daughters  
With a magic like to thee,  
And as music on the waters  
Is thy sweet voice to me."

LORD BYRON.

HELEN soon sat up and declared herself quite well. She was astonished but somewhat gratified, to discover that she had fainted; her health had hitherto been unromantically robust—a little delicacy was interesting and a novelty. Besides which, during the interval of unconsciousness, the agonizing agitation (which had thus culminated) had subsided; save for some throbbing pulses in her temples, she felt just as usual. Mr. Jones was as astonished as he was relieved by her rapid recovery, and presently left her, ostensibly to see to the mare and to keep a look-out for Phil, for whose nerves great concern was certainly due. A minute later, Helen, who was looking out through the open

window, saw him cross the road to a gateway, where he halted, and taking both a cigar-case and a matchbox from his pocket, proceeded to light a cigar, there was no dearth of matches in that box ; he struck several before he accomplished his object. Helen watched, her face alight with a smile. To please her he had not smoked, and yet he would not let her know that he sacrificed his pleasure to her comfort. How nice of him !

In a girl's vision a little circumstance may be made to do duty for a great one ; it grows or diminishes at her will. Helen chose that this virtue should grow, even as the gourd of Jonah.

Fortunately for him she could not guess that when he had screened his weak desire to please her with a white lie, it had not been to hide his merit, but in practical view of a possible future (a future that grew more possible each moment), she must learn at once that, but for the lack of ingredients, he and his cigar were inseparable.

With hands thrust in the pockets of his coat his straw hat tilted to shade his eyes as he scanned the road in search of Phil, this martyr stood full in her sight smoking like a chimney. She thought him handsome—and so he was—and his good-humored smile was pleasant.

Throughout their homeward drive, his conduct left nothing to be desired. He was most tender of her shaken nerves—never before had the dogcart been driven so cautiously. Never before had the strong and surefooted mare been walked uphill and down alike to save any risk to her wind in the first, and any danger to her knees in the second, instance. Both horse and groom were a little impatient of these precautions and anxious to get to their journey's end, while their master grudged each flitting field as it passed, and reached Carnation Cottage before he had told Helen a tenth of the hundred things he had to tell her.

That expression of successful assurance which acknowledged beauty sometimes flaunts, is not attractive ; it repels rather than allures. Helen was not self-conscious, though she was apt to be aggressively self-reliant, but that evening she was quiet, languid and responsive. Though she looked white, worn and ill, perfection of feature, such as she owned, is not dependent on health or coloring for beauty. Never, to her companion's mind, had she looked one half as lovely, her great eyes shone like stars under the brim of her white hat, her lips curved with a half smile, her hair, dried by the air, curled on her brow. The very existence of Lady



Lucy Freemantle faded from his mind. He forgot that a passion for an obscure young person was a passion to be stifled, not encouraged. He forgot everything but the obscure young person herself. Once or twice he forgot his adopted *role* of brotherly friendliness and broke-off on the point of some word quite unsuitable to the part. He would have welcomed the threat, nay, even the fulfillment, of a second calamity if, by such an event, she would be driven again—then and there—to his arms.

When the door in the cob wall surrounding Carnation Cottage had closed, shutting the graceful, blue-gowned figure from sight, he heaved a stupendous sigh, for an eternity lay between him and the following morning when he promised himself the pleasing duty of presenting a little enameled watch, set with the initials H. M. in glittering brilliants, now reposing in his pocket, to its delighted owner.

Miss Mitford, with a watering pot in her left hand and a spud, which she used, as old men use an index finger, to emphasize her words, in the right, hovered round her neice until bedtime. Again and again Helen had to retail the account of their escape, though the horror of the time half returned as she painted it in words, and she would gladly have

turned her thoughts elsewhere. Miss Mitford was sorry for Helen, but she not unjustly singled out the sheep as the nucleus of her interest and sympathy. She wondered to whom it belonged, whether it was a valuable animal, why Providence had not bestowed upon it a greater penetration.

“The want of sagacity in sheep is remarkable, love. Instead of avoiding their natural enemy, the dog, they approach him, though they possess no weapon of defense. They continually walk over the edge of the cliffs, following the gulls, I presume, dear, and forgetting their lack of wings. As a term of opprobrium for the dull I should prefer ‘sheep’ to ‘ass’ as less coarse and more appropriate.”

Helen refused the mutton chop and custard pudding proffered her but she made great havoc with a dish of strawberries and cream, and her spirits did not flag. She never discovered that she was overtired until she went to bed, and then she found that the events of the day had impressed themselves vividly and deeply upon her brain.

Hitherto as soon as she had lain her nut-brown head on the pillow, she had fallen asleep; but that night she could find no comfort among the lavender-scented pillows; she tossed and turned for hours. Her thoughts would allow her no rest, they

flew tumultuously back to that "New Cut" and dragged her again and again through every occurrence of that homeward drive.

Ten days after the River Meet picnic the two Misses Jones might have been seen pacing up and down the corridor at Newton Hall in grave and low-toned conversation. The subject under discussion was of such importance as to lower their high-pitched voices and banish their eternal smiles. Patricia's temper was ruffled, her forehead was puckered, her eyes, blank and sombre as holes burned in a blanket, were dark with gloom. She took the lead in the debate. Anastasia listened; though her engagement to Major Mason—that gentleman by whose side she had been seated during the drive to the picnic and the man of her choice—had been that day announced and she had every reason consequently to be gay, she too, was profoundly solemn.

"He is so obstinate," the elder Miss Jones was saying, "you ought to know what he is; if I was to hint that we were nervous, he would probably decide it at once and the wrong way. Just to show his independence, he would do it. He is quite infatuated, he hangs about the beach or the village half the day. Yesterday in the roiling sun he toiled up

with a pot of orchids to that little earwiggy place. I believe he has been there on some excuse or other every afternoon this week. He went to church twice on Sunday, and walked back with her after the service carrying that ridiculous old Aunt's spectacle case. I saw him."

"Bertie has generally got some one on hand," said the other. "Lucy is not here, you see, Pat.; there is no one in the house he cares about, it's so dull down by the sea in the summer without somebody to amuse one. Next week he is going to Paxford. He will forget this girl and settle it with Lucy."

"He will get entangled first," said Patricia, tragically. "He is over head and ears in love; don't you see him meandering about with his head on one side and Shelley under his arm?"

"She is a good-looking girl, Pat., and she's all right, you know. Gussie knows some of her people in Lincolnshire. If Bertie likes her, I don't really see—"

At these words Patricia stamped angrily upon the ground. Her stamp was formidable, for her foot was not light.

"You don't care for anything on earth but yourself, Anastasia. You are the most selfish, self-

absorbed little pig ! It is nothing to you what becomes of me. You have got Gussie now—and a precious long time you have taken about it !—so you are content. How much longer am I to wait ? Sir Edwin has been here a fortnight, and I can't do anything with him. I know he's shy of—well, of our relations—I see it ; but if we were only connected with the Paxford people he would swallow anything—even poor old grandfather.”

Anastasia was rather irritated by this attack.

“Good gracious, what am I to do, Pat.? If Bertie means to marry her, who is to prevent him ? Unfortunately, you can't lock up a marriageable young man, and only let him loose when the right person is about. Let the poor fellow amuse himself ; he means to marry Lucy—Gussie says so. If we interfere it would be fatal ; he won't stand advice.”

“I wouldn't interfere with *him*, but I should like to give the girl a hint. She is very proud. I am sure she would take the slightest hint at once.”

Anastasia paced on in silence. As long as she was allowed to remain neutral, she did not mind what happened ; she had few objects in life beyond the attainment of her own desires. She wanted

her brother to marry Lady Lucy, certainly—not for his happiness. but because a Lady Lucy for a sister-in-law was a solid advantage for herself.

“I don’t know that. Bertie’s a tremendous catch. A cart-load of hints wouldn’t put a sensible woman off twenty thousand a year.”

“I shall tell her he is engaged to Lucy.”

“She will congratulate ‘m, and you will catch it.”

“I shan’t—Bertie is a ruder. If I make a breach, they won’t have time to patch it up in these three days. Once get him off without a *fiasco*, he will forget her, and be thankful to me for keeping him out of it.”

Anastasia was getting a little bored, and would be glad to settle the matter any way, so that she might return to the garden and her lover; but, in case of possible contingencies, she thought it expedient to warn her sister and demonstrate her wisdom.

“Well, Pat., do what you think is right, if you don’t mind risking a row, Bertie mayn’t jump down your throat, but I’ve seen him angry once or twice in my life. Interfering with a love affair is like interfering in a dog-fight—you don’t get thanks from either side; you’ll be lucky if you don’t get bitten.”



"She is always about the beach in the afternoon," said Patricia. "I shall go down and ask her to come for a row. There will be plenty of time then to lead up naturally to the subject. I can say a good many things to open her eyes, and she will never guess I meant anything."

When the sisters met before dinner, and Patricia was questioned about the success of the stratagem she confessed herself baffled. She was afraid Miss Mitford did not intend to take any hint, and Patricia's invitation she had refused.

"She would hardly speak to me," that young lady complained; "but I managed to say how good it was of her to console my brother. 'Don't over-console him, Miss Mitford,' I said, 'or Lady Lucy Freemantle won't quite like it you know.' She's a collected sort of girl. She looked at me as if she had not heard what I said, then she made some irrelevant remark about the weather, and went off to play with a little child whom she held by the hand. I can't think what Bertie sees in her; she is positively forbidding. But perhaps, for all her calmness, she heard me right enough, and if so, I did not toil over that awful shingle for nothing. She is the sort of woman who prefers dignity to common sense—the very person who would fling a

fortune into the sea rather than cross a gutter to get it."

"She's as poor as a church mouse," said Anastasia, "and she wears *such* boots! I wonder Bertie, who is fastidious, can stand them. Patricia, if you want whose-his-name to adore you, don't wear your pop, - - - It doesn't suit you—it matches your cheeks."

Meanwhile, up on the hill at Carnation Cottage, poor Miss Mitford was overpowered by the exuberance of Helen's mirth. She had returned from the shore in fantastic and exultant spirits. She laughed and sang and joked until Miss Mitford sat down exhausted on the garden seat with the tears of laughter rolling down her cheeks, and a faint petition to the girl "to be quiet and go away, for pity's sake!" breaking between her gasps.

But Helen was gone out of earshot, and had entered the porch before her aunt had finished her sentence or her laughter.

That wonderful vivacity of hers lasted throughout the evening, and reappeared with her at breakfast next morning. If she was not very hungry, she was so talkative that her want of appetite passed unnoticed. Throughout the morning she helped her aunt to stick the verbenas and prick

out the seedling gloxinias. It was tiring work; by lunch-time Helen was looking fagged, and Miss Mitford was full of self-reproaches when she saw that it was so.

“You shall rest this afternoon, my love. You can lie on the sofa and read that charming book by Miss Gwynne-Hughes. You will be sure to sleep. I am going to call at the Priory—I have ordered a fly for the purpose—but you need not accompany me, though, to be sure, I should have liked your society.”

“I will come,” said Helen.

But by the time the fly had arrived she had changed her mind. She was certainly a little tired; she would take her aunt’s advice and rest.

The resting was of an odd kind; it drove her again and again to the glass, before which she arranged her hair and prinked with deliberation and anxiety. It sent her into the garden to gather more flowers to adorn the drawing-room, which was already a perfect flower-garden itself; it compelled her to mount to her bed-room and hastily don a certain pink cotton dress which she had heard admired not many days previously. Again it drove her back to the drawing-room, whither she wandered to and fro until the tinkle of the gate bell,

reaching her listening ears, seemed to remind her of her fatigue; for she sank down into an arm-chair, took up a book, and was at once engrossed in its perusal. She did not notice a shadow pass the window, nor when the door was opened, did she immediately look up; but as Sarah announced—"Mr. Flight, if you please, miss," she started, the book fell to the floor, and in that full, clear voice, for the tones of which this poor unwelcome visitor had yearned to hear again, she exclaimed—

"Oh, it is *you*?"

Though this greeting was not reassuring, it had been wrung from Helen's astonishment and the next moment she had risen with outstretched friendly hand to meet him. In a moment he saw that she had changed. Hope whispered that the change was to his advantage. Her manner had altered; the coquettish defiance, varied with cold disdain, with which she had formerly met his advances had gone—a stereotyped politeness had usurped its place.

Born and bred in woman, is the art of fence. Never did swallow swoop more lightly, more swiftly, more restlessly after his evening meal than Helen flew from subject to subject. Her ease, her frank friendliness, and her command of topic,

voice, and smile might have answered Mr. Flight's question better than any word, if he would have been content to read those lucid signs and thus have saved them both unnecessary pain.

At first the sound of her voice and the sight of her beauty was bliss sufficient, but soon he grew impatient of the chit-chat in which he was taking a secondary part. He made several unsuccessful efforts to change the subject, and then, remembering that Dr. Abercrombie remarks that no woman can talk for more than twenty minutes without cessation, he obstinately held his peace and waited for the inevitable pause. It came, he seized his opportunity and hurled his declaration into the interval.

It was the old, old story. What a remarkably dull, tiresome, threadbare old tale it is when told by the wrong person—and the wrong person somehow seems conscious of the failure and bumbles over its recital, emphasizes the wrong points, and hashes the whole thing! If he who is right is not exactly eloquent, he need *say* so little, and brevity is the soul of wit.

When she found that it was impossible to avert a scene, Helen cast her eyes on the ground and listened patiently and silently to what he told her. She

sat in a low arm-chair, face to the light. Mr. Flight tried to read his fate in her downcast face ; how it had altered—not a touch of the disdain he dreaded, no mocking curve of lip, but a steady, thoughtful brow, a woman's gentleness softening each line.

A woman, conscious of her weakness, sides, I think, almost without exception, with the weak. Her sympathies are for the unsuccessful ; her tenderness for the feeble who fails. Her love may go elsewhere, but her love is her fate, and with the direction of its flight she has little to do. Helen's awakened heart ached for the speaker, though it beat no whit the faster for his words. But to those who ask for love, compassion is no boon.

When, with a faltering voice, Helen declared that she could never, never, never be his wife, that neither long years, nor his devotion, nor his prospects, nor the wishes of her parents, nor her poverty, nor his unhappiness could ever, by any possible chance, alter one jot or tittle of her determination, it mattered very little to him whether she pitied or hated him. Though with her eyes brimming with tears she gave him both her hands, and never drew them away when his grasp crushed her slight fingers ; though she did not reprove him when he laid his lips on them ; yet, passion-blinded as he was, he



could not deduct any sign of relenting from her attitude.

She who, even under the suspicion of reproof, had flared into hot anger and retort, now hung her head when his misery wrung forth some bitter reproaches from him, and murmured, humbly—

“I know, I know ; I am so sorry ; but I didn’t believe—I didn’t understand. Forgive me.”

He found it difficult to credit that such true, deep, absorbing love as he felt could meet with no return—that it had been born only to die ; he felt that he was hardly treated, and so he was. But life is hard, and things go wrong with us more often than they go right ; into each life the rain falls heavily, and if we do not happen to see our neighbor drenched to the skin, we may rest assured that he has not escaped his share of ducking, although he may be dry and trim enough when we chance to meet him.

It was bad luck that induced Miss Mitford’s front gate bell to give so soft a tinkle that the sound escaped Helen’s sharp hearing ; it was bad luck which caused her to stand in full sight of the open window when Mr. Flight held both her hands in his and stooped to kiss them ; it was an unlucky impulse that made her wrench away those hands

and dart guiltily a yard or two asunder from the young man when the drawing-room door was opened and "Mr. Jones" was announced.

If the visitor felt surprise or annoyance at the tableau presented to him, his manner did not betray him. His self-possession was admirable ; he even covered Helen's confusion and Mr. Flight's awkward preoccupation by a flow of conversation, and when the latter took his leave, and the lady accompanied him, in answer to his earnest petition, to the front gate, he concealed a most rancorous irritability under a suave smile.

## CHAPTER X.

“The best laid schemes of mice and men  
Gang aft a-gley ;  
And leave us nought but grief and pain  
For promised joy.” BURNS.

HELEN seemed reluctant to part with Mr. Flight. Her strenuous endeavors to prolong their farewell at the garden gate met with no success. It was unreasonable of her to blame him on that account. He saw no necessity of answering her quick questions on irrelevant subjects ; he could find no small talk with which to respond to her many remarks. But just at the last he stammered out that “he understood,” “he knew,” “he hoped she would be happy,” “he hoped that *he* loved her as she should be loved.” And then, refusing to enlighten her in reply to her quick question as to what he meant, and shaking his head sadly at her hot denial of the imputation—whatever it might signify—he turned abruptly away, and left her.

It was no wonder that she looked pale as she re-

traced her steps to the house, for the blazing sun streamed down on her bare head. As she passed the sweet-brier tree she paused to gather a spray on which one of the fragile blossoms bloomed, but as she picked it the petals fell off one by one to the ground, and the resisting thorns tore her fingers. The crushed leaves left their scent upon her hands, for she held them in a vise as she re-entered the drawing-room.

Mr. Jones was standing by the window when she came in. She looked at him gravely. She had cause for gravity ; the change in his mien frightened her. She hardened her heart and sent her thoughts coursing back to past events, by the memory of which she could brace her determination. He returned her glance ; his eyes were grave and steadfast ; his attitude was alert ; his careless good humored smile was gone.

The fact was that, for once in his life, his emotions were stronger than his will. He had at the Rivers Meet picnic made up his mind that Helen should be his wife. Systematically and deliberately he had set himself to win her love. If the task had not been easy, it was none the less to his taste on that account ; neither was the result less likely to please him. She had, against his better judgment,

subjugated him; he, recognizing her disadvantages, overlooked them.

Until this moment he had been in no hurry ; he would not precipitate matters ; on the contrary, he would prolong his wooing until her feelings fully reciprocated, if they did not exceed, his own ; that would be his revenge for her obduracy.

He had promised himself a delightful time, he had laid a capital plan, but

“The best laid schemes of mice and men,  
Gang aft a-gley.”

The advent of this rival was unlooked for ; it upset his calculations and his self-control ; it maddened him.

He would not beat about the bush, he would go straight to the root of the matter. He would not have any nonsense, he told himself, angrily, before she returned. But when he saw her, looking, in her faded pink gown, as fair and delicate as one of those sea convolvulus that grew intertwined with thrift and sea-lavender on the cliffs, and a bunch of which he had gathered for her only the night before, he felt, with a sudden qualm of heart, what it would be to lose her, and he softened his words.

“I hope I did not send your friend away ?”

"He was just going when you came."

"Is he staying in the place?"

"I don't think so."

"Came over from Ilfracombe, perhaps?"

"No."

"Is he an old friend?"

"I have known him for six months."

Her way of answering him displeased and surprised him—it was reluctant and constrained, it was, oh, disquieting thought! as though she had something she wished to hide from him; this hypothesis was unbearable, and should be dismissed at any cost.

"Are you going to marry him?"

There was a pause. A pause so long as to be alarming, then she answered—

"No," in defiant and distinctly unfriendly tones. He was annoyed, but not to be deterred from gaining his point by her manner.

"You don't think I have any right to ask you that question?" he said.

"Any one has a right to ask any question, I suppose; but it is always unpleasant to be catechised."

"When I found that parson alone with you, and—and—ahem—holding your hands, what was I to believe?"

Every atom of color had forsaken her face and lips,



it returned in a flood, her eyes blazed, her lips were compressed.

“Don’t be angry. I only wanted to make sure ; for a moment, I was afraid. I knew you would have told me long ago if you had been engaged. I was a fool to doubt you. I understand : if I hadn’t been a bit annoyed I should have seen the whole thing at once.”

Mr. Jones was taking a great deal for granted. If Helen was ever to quarrel with him it would be easiest to do so when he plumed himself on his security and his rival’s defeat. A man’s vanity is coarse and unattractive, no matter with what justice it is owned.

“What would you have seen ?” she inquired.

“That the parson was to be pitied—not killed.”

“Your insight might have misled you.”

Now feminine weapons of warfare may serve their purpose in an Amazonian battle, but used against most men, and particularly against such a man as Mr. Jones, they are quite harmless ; he was a frank opponent, he hit straight from the shoulder, or he did not hit at all.

“Now, look here,” he said, going a step nearer, she was standing by the piano back to the light, “do you think that if I had come in as I did—

through no fault of mine—and seen that poor chap making love to you, and hadn't asked you what it meant but had taken it for granted that it was your 'usual custom of an afternoon,' that that would have pleased you?"

"It would have been less eccentric; but perhaps I ought to be grateful for the interest you take in my affairs."

In speaking, her voice broke, the sprig of sweet-brier which she held was trembling, and he saw it.

"I'm awfully sorry, Helen," he said, gently. "I beg your pardon. I had no right to bother you, but upon my honor I couldn't help it, I was so angry."

He had hardly heard what she said, her changing color, her evident distress, he attributed to the scene through which she had lately passed. It seemed cruel to increase her agitation himself, but he had gone so far that he could not draw back. He must secure his troubled angel at once and soothe her into perfect happiness; he could not bear to see her frown, he could not bear to think that he had wounded her. He guessed his angel had a temper, but of that he was not afraid; a temper in prospective is sometimes considered one of the rather interesting vices, but like the rest of such failings, loses its allurements at close quarters.

He stood in silence and watched her, he was thinking how fair and stately a wife she would be ; he postponed for one moment the words which should bring her to his arms. During that moment she recovered herself ; with a sudden and yet unhurried movement she seated herself on the window seat ; a table of some dimensions now intervened between herself and him.

“ We are making a very great mountain out of nothing, Mr. Jones,” she said, lightly, “ in your agitation you even forget my name. Would you mind opening the door ? The heat in here is horrible, and a draught will blow away the scent of the flowers, they are so overpowering, they make one breathless.”

He did not open the door, nor did he answer, She did not look at him but she was conscious of his steady gaze. She could bear anything just then rather than silence.

“ We will go out,” she went on quickly, “ it is cooler in the garden. I must fetch my hat and order tea. We will have tea under the trees.”

She was passing him on her way to escape through the door—how clever was her ruse to get away—her hand was close to the handle when he stepped forward and barred her progress.

"One moment," he said, "I want to speak to you."

"Not now,"—there was a wild petition in her voice which startled him—"wait—presently—not now."

"It is all right, darling. I don't want to frighten you, but the truth is I can't get through an hour without you. When I am not with you, I think of you. I dream of you every night. I want you to marry me, Helen."

He paused. She was confounded at this honor which he had thrust upon her, the lashes concealed her eyes ; she did not move nor answer.

"I'm so awfully fond of you, dear ! that very first day in the train I liked you. You are such a splendid girl, Helen ; you are so pretty, and you are such good company ; you are different from the others. I never knew that I could be such a fool about a woman. I will marry you, no one but you. After all, *love* is the thing for which to marry. Darling," with a soft contented smile and extended hand, "if you won't marry me, if you chuck me over, I shall go and drown myself, or—"

"Or marry some one else," returned his "darling;" who spoke quite collectedly. "I advise the latter course as it might not entail such notoriety."

"Helen," still smiling, "you hard-hearted little—"

"My name is Miss Mitford;" interrupted she; "perhaps you will be good enough not to call me by any other."

"My dearest girl, don't chaff, I want my answer. I am in red-hot earnest."

"So am I."

"When will you marry me?"

"Never."

Mr. Jones's smile faded. "Look here, Helen, I am in deadly seriousness. I tell you that I am most awfully fond of you. I can't put it strong enough. I love you with all my soul, I swear I do. Will you marry me?"

"No," in a low, firm voice, "I will not marry you."

"You don't mean that?"

"I do."

"That is all your answer?"

"Yes."

"You have nothing more to say to me?"

"Nothing."

He was stunned. It was not her words alone, but her hard, set face that confounded him.

"Is there some one else, Helen?"

“No.”

“You—you are not,” unsteadily, “in love with some other fellow?”

“No.”

He caught her by the wrist, pulled her into the full light of the open window, and stared into her white face.

“I could have sworn you liked me,” he said, “as no doubt that other poor chap who was here this afternoon could have done. I suppose this sort of thing diverts you; it’s a variety entertainment—one poor devil after another dancing to your pipe. I’m afraid I don’t understand women; for on my life, I don’t know what kind of gratification they get out of this form of amusement. I never guessed you were making a fool of me, Helen. I wouldn’t have believed it, I swear, I wouldn’t, unless I’d heard it myself, and seen the parson’s face just now.”

Her face did not express much amusement certainly, but she tried to back away from him into the shadow of the curtain, and he let her go with an impatient sigh. At this juncture, for the third time the gate bell tinkled its warning of an arrival, and Miss Elizabeth Mitford crossed the grass plot. She caught sight of the young man’s face at the drawing-room window, and immediately approached him,



"How do you do, Mr. Jones? I knew you were here, your cart is outside. How is dear Helen?"

"She is here to answer for herself."

"I am quite well, auntie."

"I left her lying down, Mr. Jones, I told her to rest; she was tired out, and it is such a hot day. Really," peering at her, "she looks terribly pale. Come out into the air, love; come out both of you, and we will have tea under the tulip tree. I will tell Betsey to bring it at once." And she bustled off.

"Helen, I am going. I believe I was rude just now. I hardly knew what I said; I was cut up, don't you know. I suppose it isn't your fault that you don't fancy me; upon my word, I don't know what you should see in me after all. It is rough luck though, I shall never see your face, nor hear your voice again. I have been thinking we should spend our whole lives together. That thought had taken root deep; how am I to get rid of it?"

Those were his last words. Before Helen had time to think what they meant he had gone; she heard him talking to Miss Mitford in the garden, then she heard his quick step on the gravel, then the click of the gate and the rumble of wheels,

loud at first, but soon lessening until they died into silence.

Yes, he had gone, but he would come back ; he had said he could not live without her. Surely, surely, surely he would try again. What had she said ? Her wretched pride, her suicidal vanity had made her wound him. He must know, he must guess that she was only a woman after all, and therefore to be won. The remembrance of Lady Lucy Freemantle ran a leaden thought through her brain.

The recollection of Miss Jones's "hint," her overbearing manner, the sins (of omission) of the Jones's progenitors, all these things which had combined in prompting her recent action were now replaced by a new and sickening dread, which she (unused to and restive under mental pain) strove with the strength of her strong will to banish—and failed.

"My love, we shall miss Mr. Jones," said her aunt, as they sat together under the tulip tree drinking their tea. "Men make a house lively, and he had such a pleasant cheery way about him. I declare he reminded me more than once of my poor Thomas."

"Perhaps he will come to-morrow?" Helen

was sitting, or rather, lounging back in a deck chair, her large white hat was on the grass at her feet, her hands were clasped behind her head, her eyes, soft and dewy, were fixed on her companion's face.

"Nay, my love, he bade me a last good-by, he is going to-night—on business to London I understood him to say, and then he goes to Paxford, I believe. Helen, your tea is getting cold. Dear! dear! there is a poor little fly in it."

Helen carefully extricated the fly with a leaf, and placed it on her knee to dry and recover itself, but it was past cure; the tea had been of fatal heat, and it was dead. She looked at it; how easily it had come to grief, a false flutter, a fall, and a painful death as punishment for one small mistake. To and fro in the sunshine, myriads of gnats and flies were darting—

"You are so thoughtful, love; what is it?"

"It's too hot to talk, auntie. Just look at the bed of portulacas, with the sun on it. I never saw such tints, they would drive a painter to despair."

"Mrs. Majoribank's yellow poppies are magnificent, Helen," with the gentle jealousy of the amateur gardener. "Her coarse soil suits them to

perfection ; she has promised me some seed next spring if I live so long. To my mind the seed-time is the happiest of the year. We sow, and there is hardly a limit to our expectation of joyful results. Now the harvest is a period of great anxiety ; we realize that nothing is under our own control, we are at the mercy of the elements ; we gardeners live on faith like the farmers. Mrs. Majoribanks makes a great mistake with her roses ; she will not prune, she will not sacrifice the present to the future. My love, you have scratched your hand ; you will pluck the sweet-brier, you should cut it, Helen. That is what I said to Mr. Jones ; he tore off one of the shoots so roughly as he passed the bush on his way to the gate ; he is remarkably partial to sweet-brier. Indeed I never knew such a young man so devoted to flowers. Mrs. Majoribanks is surprised at his intended marriage to that daughter of Lord Parsons being unopposed by her noble relations, but he is such an amiable and wealthy youth, and, I am sure, will make a considerate husband to any young lady. Mrs. Majoribanks quite thought, until Miss Jones herself contradicted the report, that he came here to pay his court to you, love. But, I said, Lord Parson's daughter could, from her assured position,

marry into trade, a connection which we should prefer a member of our family to avoid. I do not like gossip, Helen. I spoke most decidedly, and Mrs. Majoribanks quite agreed with me."

"How parched the lawn is, Auntie. As soon as the sun goes down and it gets cooler we will turn on the hose and water the grass as well as the flowers."

"Nay, love, it would so encourage the slugs, a heavy dew falls each night—but do as you like—Mrs. Majoribanks was very chatty, I stayed there so long walking round the garden and talking. She told me Sir Adolphus is in London, he is always adding to his wealth by fortunate speculations; everything he touches turns to gold, those girls of his will have fabulous fortunes and yet Fred Majoribanks will not propose to the elder one, who is undoubtedly attached to him, his mother says. Young men are sadly headstrong. Mrs. Majoribanks is a clever woman, Helen, she notices so many trifles which escape my observation; did you remark that Lady Jones had dyed her hair?"

"She does not dye it," said the girl, quickly, "Mrs. Majoribanks dyes hers purple and blues her ugly face, and she is a disagreeable, spiteful old woman."

Miss Mitford untied the strings of her mushroom hat, which were fastened in a bow beneath her chin, and threw back the ribbons upon her shoulders; she was overcome.

"Mrs. Majoribanks is a *friend* of mine, love," she said, with mild reproof.

"Isn't that the very reason you would like to hear her abused? There, Auntie, don't look shocked, it was a joke—only it didn't amuse you."

"You are not yourself, love, the air is oppressive and that fly prevented you drinking your tea. Will you have some raspberry vinegar instead?"

"Raspberry *vinegar*," with a laugh which was half a sob. "Vinegar already; no, thank you, I daren't touch it."

Helen's mind that evening was a weathercock, first she declared herself too tired to go to the beach, then she remembered that the children were expecting her and she must not disappoint them. At the gate she turned back, it was so hot she would stay in the garden; on reaching the bush of sweet-brier she made a fresh decision, the sea breeze on the shore would be refreshing, she would go—nay she wouldn't, it was so long a walk—she would—she wouldn't—finally she would and she went.



She returned late, very gentle and subdued, very careful of, and caressing toward, her aunt, with pensive eyes and a restless spirit.

This new mood seemed likely to be permanent, it lasted through the ensuing week and on to the final days of her visit.

The weather had broken up, a succession of thunderstorms had succeeded the heat, heavy showers fell continually, the Atlantic was troubled and stormy. Neither rough breezes nor rain kept Helen indoors, she haunted the cliffs and the sea-shore. Upon the sea-lashed rocks she would stand for hours, a tall, unbending figure against the dark background, the wind flapping her skirts and beating a warm color into her cheeks.

On the last day of her sojourn at Noelcombe she had gone for her usual evening ramble on the beach and she had walked for so long and for so far that she felt very tired as she toiled up the steep ascent homeward. Fatigue was a new sensation, but its

“Your merry heart goes all the day,  
Your sad one tires in a mile,”

as Shakespeare and several other people have hitherto observed.

When she reached Carnation Cottage, she saw Miss Elizabeth, with chintz skirt pinned up high, and Betsey's pattens protecting her feet from the damp grass, spudding up daisy roots on the lawn ; on seeing Helen she left her work and hurried toward her.

"My dear," she cried, "I thought you were never coming ! Mrs. Majoribanks has been here, she waited an hour on purpose to wish you good-by."

"I should like to have wished her good-by," said Helen with a mischievous gleam in her eyes. "*Ein ewig Lebenwohl*, is not always a wrench."

"She had news for us, Helen, she had been calling at the Joneses'; the engagement is announced."

Helen was overtired, her knees were trembling, her voice was rather harsh, she had raised it high. She turned toward the sweet-brier, then changed her mind and faced the elder lady.

"Whose engagement ?" she asked.

"Sir Edwin Shuter and Miss Patricia Jones; Mrs. Majoribanks is so vexed, she says that her son deliberately flung away his chance."

A beautiful smile crept over Helen's face, the dimples played in her cheeks ; she laughed a little joyous contented laugh to herself.

"I hope they will be as happy, as happy as the Queen," she said, returning to the bush of sweet-brier.

"Both engagements announced on the same day! A curious coincidence, Helen. Patricia's will take place first. Lady Lucy Freemantle and our Mr. Jones will not be married until Christmas, Lord Parsons will not return from America before then and he wishes to be present. The engagement gives *universal satisfaction*."

But the engagement was in truth not nearly so unprecedented as Miss Elizabeth Mitford declared.

Poor Mr. Flight, had he known it, was avenged.

## CHAPTER XI.

"We rise in glory as we sink in pride ;  
Where boasting ends, there dignity begins."

YOUNG.

"For, 'tis a question left us yet to prove,  
Whether love lead fortune, or else fortune love."

SHAKESPEARE.

SUMMER was long past. The corn was all gathered in ; the shivering trees were shedding their variegated leaves; the chilly breath of coming winter was to be felt at "rosy morn and dewy eve." Even to a genuine country lover, the last days of October, amid dying flowers, naked hedges, newly-stripped woods, and cloudy skies, are depressing, and the thought of pavements, shop windows, dry crossings, and fresh faces possesses a new and decided attraction.

But if Helen ever sighed as she trudged over sodden leaves and waded through the muddy Meriton lanes, no one heard her ; if the universal decay and death of autumn saddened her, no one suspected that it was so. How should they ? She was

the life and soul of her home—an imprisoned sunbeam in which they all rejoiced. If she smiled less easily, her smile was sweeter and less swift ; if her spirits were no longer rampant, they did not overpower—they sustained—the humor of her neighbors. If she was less ready of advice, less quick of decision, more diffident of the justice of her judgment, more lenient, more sympathetic, and more thoughtful, she “was older,” they said, as though age always wrought its change thus.

One or two of Helen’s girl-acquaintances, who belonged to the conventional, egotistical, man-hunting sect—of whom the members, in converse, manner, appearance, and lamentable monotony of character resemble each other as closely as do primroses—declared “she had grown stupid and didn’t care for *things*” (“things” meant their conversation—which, however, both in purport and intention, far exceeded their doings).

Because Helen had made a mistake, or because fortune had not been kind to her, was no reason that she should revenge herself upon fate by making her innocent family exceedingly uncomfortable, if not positively miserable, by repinings and moody preoccupation. She was not the sort of girl to visit her troubles upon her unfortunate parents, or

make them pay for her caprice. If she suffered, she suffered alone ; she showed her mettle, which was of the right quality. But, as they said, she had grown older. Under such circumstances a girl of her caliber ages apace.

But before long Helen had good cause to be pensive—a justifiable excuse for growing more sober and less childish. A sad event took place, an event at which remorse, sorrow, and some natural excitement were blent.

Mr. Flight, to whom she had been so unkind—Mr. Flight, on whom she had practiced her foolish wiles with such unlooked for result—Mr. Flight, whose very name turned her sick and cold—Mr. Flight, of whom she never thought without a stab of sharp pain—Mr. Flight had atoned for all his offenses by death. He was dead !

Poor Mr. Flight ! At least there was no mention of broken heart as the cause of his death. He had, like many a heart-whole man, taken fever at Florence, and, after a long and severe illness, had succumbed to the disease. His last words had been of Helen ; his last act had been to make his will, by which he left her everything that he possessed. She found herself the owner of fifteen thousand pounds, and forgot the satisfaction of her riches in



her anger with herself. She had never so despised herself. She had been despicably, pitilessly remorseless. Even now she could not cast her warmest thoughts to him ; she could not grieve for him, she could wish him back again.

She did not want his money ; all she wanted was to tell him how bitterly she repented, and how well she understood now that she had laughed where she had better have wept.

Regrets are vain emotions, as Helen knew to her cost—useless encumberers of the soil. Regrets must be strangled, if life is not to be a waste tangle of retrospect ; for regrets, like all weeds, grow apace.

Mrs. Mitford was very tender with the girl at this time, and would watch her, furtively and unobserved, from anxious eyes. She had drawn her own conclusion—a fresh and false one—from Helen's altered looks and ways.

“Henry,” she said one day—impulsively disclosing (as women do) the secret which she had intended to keep inviolate forever—“Henry, Helen regrets that poor young man.”

“To be sure she does,” the Rector answered, energetically. “I should think very poorly of her if she did not. Why, we all regret him. His ser-

mons were above the average, and his kindness of heart exceptional."

"But, Henry, you do not understand me. I mean more than I said. I mean that she mistook the nature of her feelings. She really and truly loved him."

For a few seconds her husband remained in thought, then he spoke slowly—

"No, Honora—I think not. Do you not remember how I scolded her for singing that ridiculous ballad to the poor man—

'It is the most exceeding bore, of all the bores I know,  
To have a friend who lost his heart a short time ago?'

Had her heart been touched, those words would not have occurred to her."

"I don't know that," said Mrs. Mitford, with an indulgent smile. "A girl will say or do anything from a sheer love of teasing."

Again, with a thoughtful brow, her husband reviewed the past, then he spoke with decision—

"You are wrong, Honora. You were always a most imaginative woman. That poor young man had no attraction for the child. I found her hiding in the hayloft more than once when he called. As there was no chance of her being discovered by him,

I do not think it possible she would have concealed herself had she formed an attachment for him."

Mrs. Mitford was shaken. She was always ready to distrust her own judgment and to rely upon that of her husband, so she brightened perceptibly.

"So she hid in the loft, did she? How Frances has searched for her, while that poor young man was with me for hours in the drawing-room. That idea upsets my theory; I am glad of it. But it is odd to me that our child should be so hard of heart. I had had several slight affairs before I was her age."

"I don't see anything wrong with Helen; she is prettier than ever, and as merry as a grig. You women are always raking and sifting and prying for a love-tale. If a girl is happy without a husband, you won't believe it."

Mrs. Mitford smiled slyly. Yet her husband was no doubt right.

"I shall send her away, Henry. Now that there is no difficulty about ways and means, I should like her to go and see my people. Change of air and scene is excellent for mind and body, besides which she will meet many—"

"So you won't be content till you have lost her, Honora. You foolish woman, why won't you keep

her here as long as you can? You will break your heart when she marries—I know it.”

“I should break my heart if she didn’t marry,” Mrs. Mitford said, smiling very sweetly at her Rector; “for I want her to be happy—as happy as I am.”

So it was arranged that Helen should pay a round of visits, with which arrangement she was nothing loath to comply. She wrote lively letters home, descriptive of lively and varied life. She made new friends and met pleasant people; she seemed to enjoy everything and find amusement everywhere. There was an even, a sustained content to be detected in her mode of writing which was foreign to her years, and particularly new to her former habits of mind. In each letter she inquired for her Aunt Elizabeth. “She never writes to me,” was her complaint, repeated over and over again.

She had been away from home about two months when the following letter from her mother awakened, with somewhat insufficient cause, an unconquerable anxiety about the dear writer’s health, and drove Helen to return to Meriton upon the very day after she received the disquieting allusion.

Mrs. Mitford had written thus—

“MY DARLING HELEN,—How cold it is. I hope that if you are tempted to wander about those draughty galleries at your uncle’s after dinner that you do *not forget* to wear a *shawl*. I am reminded of such dangers to your health by a tiresome cold in my head which I caught last eve pottering about the garden with your dear father, who is more careful to protect his fruit trees than his wife from the frost. I wrapped my head in flannel and drank several jugs of treacle posset before going to bed. I slept heavily, but awoke headachy and stupid, so this letter will be very short and flat, dear. I am rejoiced to hear how well you enjoyed the ball and how delightful you find your surroundings. Do not hurry home. I love to think of you admired, happy, and making the most of your youth. I read your letters again and again, and you are never absent from my thoughts, my dearest.

“Your loving mother,

“HONORA MITFORD.

“P. S.—By the by, your Aunt Elizabeth has written at last; your father received the letter some days ago. Betsey has been ill—seriously ill—and her time has been fully occupied with the

consequent sick nursing; she is better now and downstairs again. Elizabeth seems very full of those dreadful Jones people, who have gone a frightful smash. The old man has been speculating in the most reckless way—the shock of ruin, upon all those good dinners of which we have heard, brought on apoplexy; he is dead. If I can find Elizabeth's letter, I will inclose it."

But the latter had not been inclosed, and very soon after Helen's arrival at Meriton she led the conversation to Noelcombe.

"What was the matter with poor old Betsey," the girl asked. She stood before the fire with her arm around her mother's waist. Mrs. Mitford could not take her eyes away from the contemplation of her beautiful child. She had improved; yes, if it was possible, she was more lovable and loving than before, and she had torn herself from a household of friends and cousins, had relinquished the prospect of a party, had hurried home to see with her own eyes and hear with her own ears that the "tiresome cold" of which she had been told was of no deadly character.

"A very serious touch of influenza. Oh, Nellie, I can't bear to think that you have left so much pleasure on my account. It was foolish of me to



mention my cold, but I thought you knew I only sneeze for a day or two and put on an extra shawl, and then one of my colds goes. Why, I am quite well again to-day. The delight of seeing you, my darling, is spoiled when I remember what you have given up for me."

"I have given up nothing, mother. I wanted to come home every single day I was away. Of course I was having great fun—lots going on—but I was a little mammy-sick; I always am. How long was Betsey ill?"

"I don't remember exactly. Helen, did you meet with any very charming people?"

"Oh, yes, most of them were awfully nice. Mother, you did not inclose auntie's letter."

"No, dearest, your father had gone out and must have taken it with him. I couldn't find it, I asked him where it was just before you came, but he had torn it up and thrown it into the waste-paper basket. Never mind, she had nothing to say; she does write such dull letters, poor dear."

Late that night when the Meriton household had been long asleep a stealthy figure, wrapped in a red flannel dressing-gown, with brown hair hanging straight and thick to the knees, and a beautiful, eager face, on which the candle that she shaded

with her hand shone, crept slowly and cautiously down the stairs and made her noiseless way to the rector's study.

Helen,—for she it was—set patiently to work over the accomplishment of her intention. Sitting on the floor by the side of the waste-paper basket, she pieced, contrived, patched the severed and scattered fragments of Miss Elizabeth's letter into a legible whole. It was a difficult and laborious achievement. She was blue with cold; her teeth chattered, and her fingers were stiff and half frozen; bodily discomforts were unheeded, for her heart was hot within her. Again and again she read those pieced atoms, and then, gathering them carefully together, she stole back to her room. Holding them in her closed hand, she got into bed and lay there cold, shivering, and sleepless until dawn; then she relighted the candle and reread the letter, which ran as follows:—

“MY VERY DEAR HENRY,—I have not written since I congratulated and condoled with you and yours on the sad death and extraordinary generosity of your late curate. It is one of those events over which tears and gratitude mingle. I do not wonder at his attachment to my niece, for during her visit

at my cottage I learned to love her dearly. Betsey has been ill ; this must be my excuse for an unusually lengthy silence, for my time was much occupied both with attending to her requirements and fulfilling her necessarily relinquished duties. She suffered from influenza, and was for some days in a critical condition ; she is now happily convalescent. Irritability—a natural consequence of weakness, it seems—has attacked her ; but of that, perhaps, it is unkind to speak. Helen will grieve with me over the sad ruin of our kind friends the Joneses. The news of the catastrophe fell like a thunderbolt upon us here, though I understood from Mrs. Majoribanks that something of the sort was anticipated by the better informed in London. It has been discovered that poor Sir Adolphus, whose sudden death from apoplexy heralded the publicity of the disaster, was a speculator of colossal and reckless enterprise. His business had declined somewhat, and his expenditure was in excess of his receipts. He sought to recoup himself by a venture of great risk and magnitude ; its failure hastened, if it did not wholly occasion, the impending calamity. I understand that the fortunes of Lady Shuter and Mrs. Mason are secure ; also that a considerable sum was settled upon the widow and son, but this they have decided to relin-

quish in favor of the creditors, whose claims will in consequence be fully discharged. Much admiration is expressed for their conduct by the kindly disposed, though it is grievous to find how many will discover something at which to cavil in an action, however noble. The nights are very cold, and I have to superintend the warming of the conservatory. John overheated the flues one day last week, and had I not detected his blunder in time to avert danger, I tremble to think of what the consequences might have been. Convey my warmest love to dear Honora, and

“Believe me, your fondly attached,

“ELIZABETH MITFORD.”

The next day was Sunday, a day on which enforced idleness begets “long thoughts.” When the organ plays and when the parson preaches, upon what vast wanderings does an ill-regulated attention engage, upon what diverse tracts and over what leagues of space does imagination travel. If Helen’s mind was not under proper control, her voice, for which the congregation were wont to listen, and with which she led the village choir, had grown in depth and power, it rang clear, sweet, and rich, never faltering nor tiring through

the chants and hymns. Her eyes, deep as the sea, and very grave, were lowered to the contemplation of her book.

Upon Monday morning the news of Miss Elizabeth Mitford's illness reached the Rectory, this time it was Betsey who wrote. Her style was not discursive, in three bold lines she announced that her mistress "was very bad with the influenza, and that the doctor came twice a day, but said nothing."

Mr. Mitford received the letter at the breakfast table and read it aloud to his companions. Both he and his wife, between the discussion of ham, eggs, and coffee, were full of sympathy with the invalid. Helen did not join her condolences with theirs, but when the topic was at length dismissed she suddenly and unexpected recalled it by suggesting that she, herself, should go to Carnation Cottage and nurse "poor Aunt Elizabeth. She loved sick nursing, she loved Aunt Elizabeth, she should love to be with her, might she go?"

The mild opposition of her mother gave her resolution strength, she described the miseries, the sufferings, the ravages of the Russian pest with such tragic vehemence as to wring the listeners' tender hearts, till they swallowed all remembrance



of the void the loss of the girl's presence would entail, and told her eagerly that she should go, she should go at once, that very day.

"You have inherited your father's good heart, Helen," said her mother, fondly.

"You have learned unselfishness from your dear mother, Helen," added her father, patting her head caressingly.

These terms of approbation affected their daughter strangely, she colored up to the eyes, tried to speak, but her quivering lips would not obey her, and then, with a murmur, of which the words "too good to me," alone were intelligible, got up and left the room.

"Helen has grown so sensitive, Henry. Last night her eyes were full of tears during your sermon, and really I hardly thought it so affecting as usual."

"She is a very good girl, indeed," said the Rector, heartily, "give me the *Bradshaw*, Honora, I must look out her train and send a telegram to Betsey."

The next evening saw Helen once more an inmate of Carnation Cottage—the warmth of her welcome was overpowering. She found that Betsey had not exaggerated the severity of Miss



Mitford's illness, and Betsey herself was still too weak to attend to her mistress, so that Helen's presence was most opportune. For several days she hardly left the sickroom, she was a devoted, gentle, and skillful nurse. Under her dexterous care Miss Mitford steadily gained ground, and before a week had passed was down stairs on the sofa.

Though Carnation Cottage was at its best in the spring and summer, its winter comforts were not to be despised; heavy portieres excluded draughts, the conservatory supplied an abundant stock of flowers; log fires blazed in the low grates. Helen loved every nook and corner, every chair and table in the little drawing-room, she sat on a tiny chair which she had drawn to the sofa-side on which her aunt, propped on down pillows and covered with a *couvre-pied*, was reclining, and looked round her with a new far-away expression in her eyes which made them very sad and dreamy. Presently these two began to discuss a subject which they had already worn threadbare, they had talked it over so often and so minutely, that they had no new light, no new thought, no new difficulty about the matter, but yet as soon as Miss Mitford had finished her afternoon siesta and

opened her eyes, she naturally and inevitably returned to the familiar theme.

“My love, Lady Jones had an annuity, a small annuity, but sufficient for her wants, left her by her father; of course it was praiseworthy of her to relinquish her claim to the money, but when we remember that the young man has no money, not a sixpence, that he has been reared in affluence, that he has never known an ungratified desire, and that under these circumstances, he voluntarily relinquished a handsome independence, we must find it impossible to express, with adequate strength, our warm admiration of the nobility of his conduct.”

Helen had taken up the piece of embroidery from her lap and had begun to stitch with some show of industry, she was obliged to bend low over her work, and the winter afternoon was drawing to a close, and the room was dusk.

“I wonder what he will do,” she said.

“He will do well, mark my words, Helen. He has many friends. I hear that already he has entered a house of business in which he is likely, through the favor of the proprietor, to succeed, if he proves himself intelligent and reliable—such qualities we know he possesses. Don’t sigh, my

love; rats alone desert a sinking ship, the captain and her crew are the last to leave her. If that unworthy woman whom he loved chose to renounce him at the approach of trouble, she is no better than a rat, and of such vermin he is well rid."

"Perhaps it was not quite all her fault," said Helen, slowly; "perhaps he would not drag the girl he liked into poverty. Perhaps she could not help it."

"She should have made a point of helping it," said Aunt Elizabeth, with energy. "When does a man really find comfort in a woman? When does a man appreciate the blessing of an affectionate wife? Why, when he is in trouble, to be sure. And any woman worthy the name knows it, and glories in the knowledge; and any woman worthy of the name would have remained by his side as constant as a compass and as adhesive as a burr. She should have been glad and proud to stay by him. I met him in the road one afternoon last week; I ran and shook him by the hand—I couldn't speak—but he was just as usual, though a little graver in his manner, and his face looked older; twenty years older he had grown in three months. He came in here with me and had some

tea ; he stayed a long while—he seemed pleased to stay. We talked of the summer, love, and of you, and I told him of the strange generosity of poor Mr. Flight, and then he went away ; but he promised to come again if he was at Noelcombe. He should be to and fro till the business was settled and the house sold, he said.”

“ Did he say anything about that girl, auntie ? ”

‘ Which girl ? Oh, you mean Lady Lucy Free-mantle. No, my love, he talked of you ; men do not speak of matters upon which they feel deeply. He talked much of you. I showed him your new photograph ; he did not think it at all good, not at all. It is a most curious thing, Helen, I have mislaid that likeness ; from that day to this, I have never found it, though I have searched diligently, I must have sent it back to the library in a book, I have lost many letters thus and some valuable packets of flower seeds. The orchid which the young man gave me is dead—it wanted more heat than I could give it here. Good gracious, love, that is the front door bell ; pull down the *couvre-pied* over my feet and set my cap straight ; the room is nearly dark. Will you light the candles on the mantelpiece ? What ? you prefer the dusk ? Very well. My love—Helen ! where are you

going? Don't leave the room. Stay, I want you to stay."

But she had gone; and while Miss Mitford was still imploring and commanding her to return, Mr. Jones was shown into the room.

## CHAPTER XII.

"Great let me call him, for he conquered me."

YOUNG.

"Had I not loved thee, my sky had been clear,  
Had I not loved thee, I had not been here,  
Weeping by thee."

WHETHER some recollection of her own girlhood, or whether the glimpse of her niece's face as she escaped, or whether the intuitive perception of a woman in the scenting-out of such "small-game" as a love-affair, brought nascent suspicion upon Miss Elizabeth Mitford's hitherto obtuse mind, she could never afterward decide. But, in the flash of an eye, the suspicion grew to certainty : she knew that what "Thomas" had once been to her this hand-some but poverty-stricken and recently-jilted visitor was to her dear niece.

She had been parted from her Thomas and was wont to congratulate herself on that circumstance, but to have escaped the torture of that never-to-be-forgotten ~~grief~~, she would have endured the long



unhappy wifehood of her successful rival, had the choice between those two evils been left to her decision. She would—she would indeed. Memories and half-dead longings were awakened by the transient glimpse of Helen's face, and she was ready for the first time in her life to proclaim her weakness.

She felt quite faint at her discovery, but this did not prevent her receiving the gentleman with great warmth and friendliness. He was, of course, totally unconscious and at ease. He sat down on the same tiny chair as before and asked with much interest about the influenza. Her answers were absent and a little puzzling ; she hardly knew what he said so sick was she with the responsibility of immediate action. Should she casually mention her niece's presence and judge by his face whether the knowledge affected him in any way ? But the most expressive feature—his mouth—was hidden by a mustache, and those dark eyes of his defied scrutiny, especially in this dusky light. He went on talking; the frank youthfulness of his manner had changed; he was no longer debonair and careless—he had grown earnest and grave, almost to sternness. Every now and then there was a weary note in his voice which wrung the old lady's heart; she grew each moment more

confused and abstracted. He became aware of this, and, thinking that she was weak from recent illness, and therefore unfit for conversation, he presently rose to take his leave.

"I am tiring you," he said, "so I will go. I have finished all the business down here. I go up to town to-morrow and get to work next week, so I must wish you a long good-by."

"You must not go," with the authority of a general in action; "you must stay to tea. Kindly ring the bell."

He obeyed her and reseated himself.

"I can never tear myself away, if you are so kind," he said.

She nodded, she could not speak. "His great grandfather," she was thinking, "wore three hats and dealt in second-hand wardrobes—he has not got a sixpence in the world—he has been jilted," but when the bell was answered she spoke out her order clearly and with decision.

"Will you tell Miss Helen that Mr. Jones is here, and ask her to come down and make tea."

Miss Mitford was too agitated to take notes, so to speak, of the situation, but she could not avoid seeing him start or hearing the exclamation—

"Helen? Helen here, in this house?" before

his calmer reception of the news by the remark, "I had no idea Miss Mitford was with you," reached her.

As the door opened she watched him, wondering whether it was her fancy which made his face look so white, but the incomer was not Helen, but Betsey with the tea.

"Miss Helen went out ten minutes ago, ma'am ; she has gone to the post."

This news staggered her aunt, she stared blankly at her companion, a sudden flame leaped out of a kindled log and played on the fire of his eyes. Then, for the first time in all her guileless life, Miss Elizabeth created a plot.

"Mr. Jones," she said, "you hear that Helen has gone out; I am vexed with her for doing so, she should have sent a servant with the letter ; it is growing dark rapidly, the road through the glen is very lonely, it is not fit for her to walk there alone. You will think me a great fidget but it would be such a relief to my mind if you would go and meet her," then, seeing the hesitation of his face, she went on tremulously, "I have been ill ; the illness has left me weak and nervous, I am anxious about her and I presume upon your kindness."

The request so couched was almost impossible to refuse, he did not attempt to refuse it, he went. When she heard the garden gate slam a minute or two later, she cried, plaintively:

“Dear, dear, I am a creature of impulse, after all,” and she buried her face in her hands and trembled. Still trembling she left the sofa and rang the bell for Betsey.

“Betsey,” she said, “I am exceedingly tired, I shall go up stairs to my room and keep quiet. Tell Louisa to bring the lamps in here, she may put on the new pink shades, she must make up a large fire and keep the muffins hot. Mr. Jones and Miss Mitford will be in to tea before long.”

“How long, ma’am?”

“Well, indeed, I don’t quite know, Betsey. Give me your arm, I must lean on something, I feel so very shaky.”

A young girl, however courageous, has seldom the hardihood necessary to lead her to face a difficult situation when by any possible action she can escape the ordeal. Flight is the first and often the only available tactic. To this refuge Helen had resorted. She had put on her coat and hat, stamped and sealed her letter to Mrs. Mitford, and, after

mentioning carelessly to Betsey that she was going to the post, she softly crept across the hall and let herself out by the front door. It was dreadful to leave the house, but to remain there was worse, she had escaped the meeting—but, unfortunately, she could not escape herself. She walked very quickly, it was dark beneath the trees in the glen and their branches creaked, for the wind was blowing sharply. Down the steep, rough village street she sped apace—how soon, how far too soon she reached the post-office and fulfilled her errand!

The sun had gone down, but a full moon was rising over the sea, the tide was high and the rough waves were bellowing at the foot of the cliffs. They lashed the broken rocks—they drew Helen toward them, for their loud wailing was attune with her heart; they were in sympathy with her mood. Their might, their strength, their majesty overwhelmed her personal trouble, she could forget all things in heaven and earth if she might stand beside them.

Below the village, to the right of the beach, was a broad ridge of rock which had been a haunt of hers in other times, the descent thither was hazardous in the faint light but she climbed down and

stood on the wide ledge with the wind beating against her and the salt spray wetting her face. The silver pathway spread from her very feet to the pale moon, black western clouds were piled like mountains against the faint sky on which a few stars glimmered. The heavy crested waves broke with a roar like thunder on the crags, the cream-like foam looked soft and gentle, now and again a drenching, large-dropped shower of spray fell upon the rock a few feet beyond her.

“Unfathomable sea, whose waves are years,  
Ocean of time, whose waters of deep woe  
Are brackish with the salt of human tears,”

and yet whose sound is a tonic to our spirits as much as its breath is a tonic for our bodies.

It was long before she turned away from the wonder of the waves, away from the beauty and grandeur of the sky, she was calmed and strengthened, she was ready to “go home.” Close behind her stood a figure whose approach the roar of the water had drowned and who had neither spoken nor moved but who had been standing, motionless, watching her.

His face was set and stern, and there was a great sadness in the eyes which met hers as she turned



slowly round toward him. Her mind was so full of him ; he seemed to have been so near her all through these months that she was hardly surprised to find him there, in the flesh, by her side. He spoke to her as if their meeting and his presence were things of course, as if they had never parted, as if he had forgotten that last scene from the memory of which all her meditation had been drawn of late.

"I heard where you had gone and followed you," he said. "The tide is still coming in ; the waves lick over this rock in a squall ; it isn't a safe place for you."

She was angry with the raging waters for deadening the full sound of his voice. She had to lift up her head to catch the meaning of his words.

"I was sent to fetch you home."

Alas, he had been *sent* ! He had always read her thoughts, he did so now, but not correctly.

"Miss Mitford sent me—I hope you do not mind—she was anxious about you, so I came ; it was," slowly, "the only chance I had of seeing you, so, right or wrong, I took it."

"We must go," she said.

"Not yet, not yet. Wait ; you won't mind

waiting just a moment ; it will be the last time—the only time—don't you remember we used to want to watch a storm together ? ”

So she turned again to the sea, as he wished, and waited.

He was young ; the black nightmare of all his troubles rolled away like a dream, and the glamour of the past returned upon him. He had been bereaved, ruined, jilted, but his years were few and his love was great—how great it was he had discovered when, from a careless habit of drifting with the tide and in pique, he had bound himself irrevocably to another woman. He was free now to play with fire ; he might seam and scar his fingers at his will, he might just, for this one last time, return to the dear days when he had been so hopeful, so happy, when life had been a merry game, when poverty, loneliness, and failure had seemed remote as death. He might feast his eyes on her for the last time ; he might listen once more to the music of her voice—if she would only speak, which she didn't. At any rate she stood close beside him. The curves of her graceful figure, the erect pose of her head, the sweep of her uplifted arm—for she held the flapping brim of her hat with her hand—were all alike beautiful and familiar. Before them

the roar and splash of the waves boomed and clashed an eternal diapason.

"I am glad you came here," he said, after a long, long silence; "I am glad we have seen a storm together, after all. Come, we must go."

She turned docilely and followed him. He led the way up the difficult path to the village; he did not offer to help her, she followed close at his heels. He seemed afraid of another silence and talked fast, but on the surface of things; she answered in low monosyllables. They had passed the village and were entering the shadows of the glen; how the time rushed by—these bitter-sweet moments which, the bend in the road once passed, would be at an end forever. Her heart was throbbing fast with pain; he was so calm, so self-contained, while she could not command her trembling voice so as to answer him. *Once* she had had her chance, *once* she might have had all for which she now pined, but she had flung it away. "He that will not when he may—when he will, he shall have 'nay.'" How was she to know that this calmness was born of something like despair?—that of all his troubles the bitterest by far had been caused by her? He, too, was realizing that these moments were almost over; he, too, had a pain like a knife in his breast. Sudden-

ly, on an impulse, he broke out with a fragment of a moan. He was by nature frank and unreserved, and the darkness, through which they walked, made confession easy.

"I used to think I was such a lucky chap ; everything always went straight ; I never had the heart-ache in my life till—till last July, Helen. Then my luck changed ; I changed ; and now, you know—at least, you must have heard—how badly things have gone with us."

He could not see the quivering face she turned away from him, but he heard a smothered sob.

"How sweet you are," he said ; "you are sorry for us."

"Not for you," she answered, desperately, "but for myself."

"Why for yourself ?" very gently.

"Because, because—I may only watch a storm at sea with you, and I want to help you through other—harder—storms." She spoke distinctly.

"That is *pity*."

"No," she said, with some return of her old spirit, "it is not."

"What do you mean, Helen ?"

"I mean that when you left me, when you deserted me, I broke my heart."

"Do you know what you are saying? Do you know that this is cruel?—that your pity makes you mad."

"*Pity!* I tell you it is not pity. Whom should I pity?"

"Me."

"Why should I pity you?"

"A ruined, jilted, obscure man gets pity, if not contempt."

"Don't talk like that, I will not listen to you. I pity any one who pities you. I never understood, I was puzzled, I was angry because I did not know what made me like you; but I know now, I have heard now, the whole world knows what you have done."

"That's as I thought," he told her gravely; "that is what I feared. You have got hold of some exaggerated tale about this business—such as women love—and have made a saint out of a sinner, a hero out of an honest tradesman. And now you fancy things, in your generosity you would say anything. Before, when nothing stood between us, you would not look at me."

"Wouldn't I? You only tried me once, and then you went away, and—and—!"

"Hush, hush! don't talk like this now. It is too late."

The pained agitation of his manner was her best consolation.

"I am not going to make love to you any more," she said, with an imitation of her former vivacity, the effect of which the break in her voice destroyed. If you won't have me when I throw myself at your head, it is very disagreeable and rude of you."

"You don't understand what you offer."

"Excuse me, but I understand perfectly."

"I have nothing, I have to begin work as an unpaid clerk in a merchant's office; my mother will live with me. It will be uphill work for years and years, even if I am most fortunate."

"Yes," she said, "and you are a man of expensive tastes, you have used luxuries as necessities. Poverty will be terribly hard on you; you will get bad-tempered, you will want a vent for your anger—have me!"

They had emerged from the shadow of the glen and reached the garden door, and through the dim twilight her brave eyes, wet with tears, smiled at him. His scruples were vanishing into air, he had much to do to keep cool. With his hand upon



the handle of the gate he paused and questioned her—

“Tell me, what has changed you, Helen?”

“I have not changed.”

“Not changed? Five months ago you refused to marry me.”

“You had everything then, you didn’t want me, at least, not much. I was blind and vain; and a fool. I may be a fool now, but I am no longer blind; I have seen clearly enough since July. I have learned a great deal.”

“You know so little of me.”

“That is true. I have told myself so a hundred thousand times.”

“Helen, you are torturing me, you tempt me beyond endurance.”

“Then open the door, if you please, and let me go.”

“No, no! I can never let you go now.”

“I must have tea, you forget the time,” getting nervous over the crisis which she herself had brought about.

“Listen, Helen, I don’t want pity, I want love; you may mistake the one for the other; you probably do.”

“Did I pity you last summer,” she answered

impatiently. "And when you left me in a moment, and went away to that other woman, do you think the pain I had was pity. It isn't like you, it isn't kind of you to make me say all this. You have said nothing. I don't know why I should think you care for me. Let me go."

"Never," he said ; and he took her into his arms and kissed her.

Every one said that the beautiful Miss Mitford and her fifteen thousand pounds were being thrown away upon Mr. Jones—of the city. Mr. Jones himself was wont to say so, and to predict great miseries in store for her. She often acquiesced in these prophecies ; for she, except on one momentous occasion, was chary of feeding the vanity or lavishing tender words on the lover of her choice.

At first, Mr. and Mrs. Mitford had been slightly shocked by their daughter's departure. Why Helen should have engaged herself to the ruined son of "those dreadful Joneses" was incomprehensible to them ; but when their mild remonstrances were met by a passionate and vehement confession of her great love for this undesirable person, they instantly became sympathetic and congratulatory.

Helen had always been right, she was probably right now.

In the following June, upon the day preceding Helen's wedding, the Rectory was the scene of great, though subdued excitement. Bridesmaids, uncles, aunts, stray men, and country neighbors thronged house and garden. The presents, the trousseau, the flowers, and the bride-elect were on view. It was to be a gay wedding (as the saying is), every possible token of rejoicing was to be manifest, every possible honor was to be heaped on bride and bridegroom. "Though Miss Mitford was making such a bad match," the girls said, "she seemed very proud of it."

And so she was, she thought herself the most fortunate woman in the world. Even when her Aunt Elizabeth, who was directing the labels for the bridal boxes, sighed and said, pointing with an unappreciative finger at—

"*Mrs. Albert Jones,*"

"I can't make it look nice, my love."

Helen answered quickly. "What's in a name, auntie," and then added, a little wistfully, after a pause, "it is better than Hogg, at any rate."

"Bertie is the most charming fellow in the world," Mrs. Mitford put in, kissing the bride-elect's

fair cheek tenderly. "Whatever his name was, if he had no name at all, I should be glad for Nellie to be called by it."

"I don't know what all the women see in him," said the Rector rather dismally. "Fortunately he is getting on fairly well in business, Elizabeth, though I believe my foolish little girl would have married him whether or no."

**THE END.**



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